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Animals in the landscape: An analysis of the role of the animal image in representations of identity in selected Australian feature films from 1971 to 2001

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H. FORSCHER

ANIMALS IN THE LANDSCAPE

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of identity in selected Australian feature films
from 1971 to 2001

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A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements
of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,
School of Humanities, Bond University

by

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Abstract

Despite the salient role of the landscape in the development of white Australian identity, and the prominence of the landscape discourse in dominant film commentary, little attention has been afforded to the function of the animal image as a cultural representational code in the context of the meanings educed. The aim of this study is to examine the animal and human-animal representations in selected Australian films released between 1971 and 2001, and to establish the various ways in which such a focus foregrounds significations which offer new, or more complex, articulations of Australian identity.

This study was confined to live-action representations of animals, not necessarily as central figures, in Australian feature films. Within the three-decade time-frame, the films chosen for analysis were selected to provide illustrations of the main hypothesis through a range of narrative themes and genres. The films considered include those recognised as forerunners to the Revival (e.g. *Walkabout* and *Wake in Fright*); classics of the Revival (e.g. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*); Australian produced international commercial successes (e.g. *The Man From Snowy River* and *Crocodile Dundee*); as well as films which have fallen off the radar of recent Australian film commentary (e.g. *Mad Dog Morgan* and *Long Weekend*), and those that never made it into the matrix of intellectual representational discourse (e.g. *Howling III: The Marsupials* and *Razorback*).

The films were analysed as open-ended metaphors, allowing for negotiated and oppositional readings. The images and the narratives of the films were interpreted using qualitative methods grounded ontologically in a mixed method semiotic approach. All representational modes were considered: image, symbol, analogy, allegory, metaphor or metonymy. Where appropriate, cultural, psychological and behavioural theories from reception studies were employed to describe or decode textual effects. The discussion addresses overt messages and alternate interpretations. The dominant meanings were considered from the social reflection perspective and where pertinent, analysed through social imaginary theory.

The analysis found that *Walkabout* functions as the seminal text in the study of animal symbolism, human-animal representation and the objective or ‘ecological’ perspective in post-Revival Australian cinema. The film introduces a new mode and style of animal representation evident in many subsequent Australian films.

Films set around the time of Federation featuring marginalised protagonists and the landscape are found to be nationing allegories, presenting themes of equal import and greater contemporary relevance than those of male representation. More recent films with marginalised protagonists exhibit a shift in focus from the concerns of emerging nationhood to those of Australia’s emerging cosmopolitanism.

In representations of masculinity and the landscape, the privileging of the physical activity of human-animal interaction resituates the texts beyond the customary matrices of patriarchal affirmation and the promotion of a pastoral ethos. Themes of human-animal ‘mateship’ and inter-species egalitarianism are identified, as well as the

presentation of conflict resolution through symbolic metamorphosis into animality. The films are revealed to be a more complex exposition of Australian identity than previously recognised, marking a distinct development in the progression of national representations towards an environmentally aware ethos.

Analysis of the horror genre foregrounds the nexus between Australian identity, assimilation and metamorphosis into animality. The feral/indigenous dichotomy is identified as a key trope in Australian representation and the portrayal of particular modes of human-animal relationships are seen to function as indicators of deviance in characterisation. The discussion also highlights the way in which the privileging of animal representations works to emphasise the universality of the films' concerns, while simultaneously grounding them in a specific culture and location.

Principally, the findings in this study confirm my original proposition that animal-centred readings of the selected films would reveal a rich seam of fresh interpretative possibilities relevant to the discourse of Australian national cinema and identity. I have also argued that many of the cultural significations and thematic nuances offered by the texts have been overlooked or misinterpreted by a dominant commentary which repeats the omissions inherent in the viewpoint of the sublime aesthetic by failing to recognise the codes and conventions signified in the detail of the filmic representations.

More broadly, this study exemplifies the ways in which animal-centred readings not only resituate certain texts within the cannon of Australian national cinema, but how depictions of animals and the human-animal relationship function simultaneously as both nationing and universalising tropes. By admitting animal-focused discussion into the

norms of Australian cultural criticism and textual discourse, the resulting significations connect the texts with a global contemporary inflection in existential concern: namely that of the relationship between humans and the environment.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma at any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no work previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Helene Forscher

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Introduction

The Problem

The nature/culture dichotomy and the role of the landscape have both been salient tropes in the discussion of dominant meanings in Australian cultural texts, including film, over the past 30 years. Yet, until the publication of *Sheep and the Australian Cinema* in 2006 by Deb Verhoeven, based on her 2004 doctoral thesis *Wool Blend: Sheep and the Australian Social Fabric*, no sustained examination of the representation of the animal image in Australian national cinema had been attempted.

Nor has there been any cultural study of white Australian animal symbolism. This omission is all the more puzzling when one considers the emphasis placed on the animal image in the construction and marketing of Australian identity and the iconic use of some of the many species unique to the continent, such as the kangaroo, koala and emu. In the context of Australian cinema studies, the fact that three of the top five of the country's most successful films in box-office terms – *The Man From Snowy River*, *Crocodile Dundee* and *Babe* (AFC Resources, 2001) – are all animal-related narratives, would also suggest the existence, at some level, somewhere, of discourse or commentary specific to the topic.

Industry debates are central to discussions of any national cinema. In Australia, this focus has been intensified in recent years by the financial constraints of its operation, if not the threats to its very existence. Cultural criticism and textual analysis play a significant role in the conditions of production and reception. As O'Regan observes, the 'means of making sense' of Australian film, of recognising and acknowledging the diversity of the 'Australian voice', is subject to the 'public and cultural norms' which limit that which can 'be spoken about' (O'Regan, 1987;1997).

The aim of this study is to examine the animal and human-animal representations in selected Australian films released between 1971 and 2001, and through the discussion of the findings to establish the various ways in which such a focus foregrounds significations which offer new or more complex articulations of Australian identity. More broadly, the study also aims to show how animal-centred readings not only resituate certain texts within the canon of Australian national cinema, but that depictions of animals and the human-animal relationship function simultaneously as both nationing and universalising tropes. By admitting animal-centred discussion into the norms of Australian cultural criticism and textual discourse, the resulting significations connect the texts with a global contemporary inflection in existential concern: namely that of the relationship between humans and the environment. As Elsaesser posits in *Film History and Visual Pleasure*:

Pleasure, as it is bound up with signification, representation, meaning, perception and memory, is ... implicated in history as the shifting and fixing of the relationships between desire and representation. (1984, p. 51)

The ultimate aim of this dissertation, therefore, is to point towards a modification in the discipline of film studies which promises to re-frame the traditional thematics of Australian representation as pertinent to contemporary articulations of Australian national identity by emphasising the global signification inherent within them.

Background and Rationale

The field of cultural criticism concerned with the study of human-animal representation is a new one. The main constraint to research in this area arises from accusations of ‘anthropomorphism’ or ‘sentimentality’: ‘that research into the meaning and function of the animal in the human world involves a kind of self-indulgent taste for the trivial’ or ‘immature emotional investment’ (Armstrong, 2003, ¶3). For the purposes of my argument, it is necessary, therefore, to first broadly trace the connections between ideology and narrative and the role of the animal image in cultural expression and identity.

Cultural observers as diverse as Benedict (1974/1946), Denzin (1991a, 1991b), Eco (1966), Frye (1973/1957), Jameson (1981), Molloy (1990a, 1990b) and Riesman (1950), have all propounded that one commanding approach for decoding a society’s values and beliefs is to examine the stories it tells. Because cultural narratives are created and consumed by those dwelling within a commonly-shared ideological community, they both preserve and perpetuate that society’s sense of identity (Urban, 1991). Cultural texts

address such ongoing concerns as gender relationships, racial categories, and social class distinctions, while establishing boundaries between society's conceptions of Good and Evil, Culture and Nature and the Sacred and Secular (Lévi-Strauss, 1962, 1963, 1966; Kozloff, 1987; Turner, 1967). It is becoming increasingly recognised that cultural narratives encode norms and beliefs that can serve as important agents of both acculturation and socialization (Faber & O'Guinn 1988; O'Guinn, Faber, & Rice 1985; O'Guinn & Faber 1991, cited in Hirschman and Sanders, 1997).

If culture is formed by the history of its representations expressed in narrative, as Graeme Turner maintains in *National Fictions*, then prominent among these cultural narratives in modern society are motion pictures (Denzin, 1991a, 1991b; Jowett & Linton, 1989), and the examination of film texts and the study of the narratives therein can suggest much about the culture that produced them (Turner, 1986, p. 144). Each text creates a single interpretation in which the signposts of communication attain symbolism within a general or 'master code' of sign systems, which may or may not exist independently of the text itself. According to Turner, the repertoire of agreed-upon representational codes to be found in texts result from the 'discursive mediation which occurs between the event and the culture' (Turner, 1986, p. 123), and it is these codes which contribute to the construction of national ideologies. Jameson understands ideology as 'the aesthetic act itself' and 'the production of aesthetic or narrative form is to be seen as an ideological act in its own right ...' (cited in Turner, 1986, p. 142). According to Jameson, narrative form has 'the function of inventing imaginary or formal "solutions" to unresolvable social contradictions' (Jameson cited in Turner, 1986, p. 142). Here Jameson echoes the myth

theory expounded by Lévi-Strauss, in which he explores the connection between myth and culture, wherein myths - and by analogic extrapolation, film narratives - are seen to provide symbolic resolutions to social contradictions. Accordingly, culture is not so much concerned with 'truth' as with interpretations of history reflecting the dominant ideology.

Animals have been, and continue to be, of intrinsic symbolic importance in human society. The significance of the human/animal bond has been reflected in dance, art, and narrative for thousands of years (Shepard, 1996): our language is charged with animal terms and metaphors (Bryant, 1979), and some suggest that our most profound human social problems are better understood in reflection on the human/animal relationship (Lockwood & Ascione, 1997). The first subject matter for painting was animal, the first paint probably animal blood: 'prior to that, it is not unreasonable to suppose that the first metaphor was animal' (Berger, 1980, p. 5). Rousseau, in his *Essay on the Origins of Languages*, maintains that language itself began with metaphor:

As emotions were the first motives which induced man to speak, his first utterances were tropes (metaphors). Figurative language was first to be born, proper meanings were the last to be found. (Rousseau, cited in Berger, 1980, p. 5)

In his seminal essay *Why Look at Animals?*, Berger contends that if the first metaphor was animal: 'it was because the essential relation between man and animal was metaphoric. Within that relation, what the two terms - man and animal - shared in common revealed what differentiated them. And vice versa' (Berger, 1980, p. 5). In *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss comments on Rousseau's reasoning:

It is because man originally felt himself identical to all those like him (among which, as Rousseau explicitly says, we must include animals) that he came to acquire the capacity to distinguish *himself* as he distinguishes *them* - i.e., to use the diversity of species for conceptual support for social differentiation. (Lévi-Strauss cited in Berger, 1980, p. 5. Original emphasis)

The parallelism of an animal's similar/dissimilar life to a human's allowed animals to provoke some of the first questions about human identity and the passage from nature to culture (Berger, 1980, p. 5).

While the concept of social differentiation is fundamental to myth, identity and the search for origin in all cultures, a study investigating the ideology of those films portraying the relationship between people and animals is of particular relevance when addressing the specific problematics of Australian identity and representation. For it is within the relationship between animals and humans that the nature/culture dichotomy is likely to be drawn most clearly (Hirschman & Sanders, 1997, pp. 53-79), and it is this dichotomy that is essential to the understanding of Australian representations. The particularity of white Australian origins and the resulting duality of concerns both physical and metaphysical, point to the substantial ideological encoding to be found in this most fundamental site for both physical and metaphysical differentiation.

As Giddens observes, self-identity is '*the self as reflexively understood by the person in terms of her or his biography*' (Giddens, 1991, p. 53. Original emphasis). While most nations go through the complex ideological negotiation process involved in the invention

of a national identity - a process of biography which is ongoing, despite the age or 'maturity' of a nation - white Australia's historical beginnings can be regarded as distinct, for not only did it reside in the aesthesia of another continent, as with other nations of colonial past, but its temporal and spatial terms of reference were most often antithetical to the 'realities' of the new country. On the shores of *Terra Australis Incognita* the time/space relationships of the theoretically presumed order were necessarily contorted in an effort to construct meaning from 'the new land of contrarities' (White, 1981, pp. 1-15).

Cultural historians such as White describe the colonists' Australia as not only physically unfamiliar - a strange land 'full of natural oddities that did not fit into the accepted order of things, a topsy-turvy world where nature seemed at odds with herself' (White, 1981, p. 14) - but also as philosophically problematic to the European mind. With beginnings as a penal colony, the natural order of things was again inverted, for contrary to possible interpretation as 'a mission of hope' (Brady cited in Turner, 1986, p. 74) like the settlement of North America or South Africa, the initial Australian experience was one of exile. For Turner, the problem of inventing or discovering meaning, while universal, has been subject to 'specifically Australian physical and metaphysical' considerations. Early Australia could not but perceive itself - through contrasts with European norms - as a 'delinquent society' (Turner, 1986, p. 75). As Turner observes, 'the most important relation to recognise is that which exists between the condition of white Australia's beginnings on the one hand and the kind of meaning now given to our sense of place, our history and our contemporary version of the self on the other hand' (Turner, 1986, p.76).

In *Inventing Australia*, White argues that Australia is unique in the extent of its efforts during its white history to 'not merely describe the continent, but to give it an individuality, a personality' (White, 1981, p. viii). Dermody and Jacka refer to 'the motif or "burden" of place to be found in Australian film, painting and literature, which describes "anguish " over the interpreted nature of the place ... lone figures lost in the landscape' (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p.21). The poet Judith Wright explains this impulse further:

Before one's country can become an accepted background against which the poet's and novelist's imagination can move unhindered, it must first be observed, understood, described and as it were, absorbed. The writer must be at peace with the landscape before he can turn confidently to its human figures (Wright, 1965, p. ix)

With a history of the pioneering colonisation of a sparsely populated continent, the representation and interpretation of Australian identity must necessarily address not only the coming-to-terms with a foreign landscape and the flora and fauna within it, but also the particularities of small and remote societies at odds with European norms, and indeed, at times, a human solitude often only assuaged by the companionship of animals. If animals have been historically perceived as an *intercession* between man and his origin in Western culture, with Darwin's evolutionary theory as a continuation of this tradition (Berger, 1980, p.4), then how much more confronting and vivid the relationship between white Australia and the unfamiliarity of the native animals of *Terra Australis Incognita* amid the lonely landscape? And conversely, how telling any difference in the relationship

between the white Australian and the animals imported from the country of cultural origin?

Taking a post-structuralist approach to what animals signify to man, in *Picturing the Beast*, Baker asserts that 'it is clear that Western society continues to draw heavily on symbolic ideas involving animals' and:

the immediate subject of those ideas is frequently not the animal itself, but rather a human subject drawing on animal imagery to make a statement about human identity ... [with] the animal frequently conceived as the archetypal cultural 'other'. (Baker, 1993, p.ix)

Baker contends:

much of our understanding of human identity and our thinking about the living animal reflects - and may even be the rather direct result of - the diverse uses to which the concept of the animal is put in popular culture, regardless of how bizarre or banal some of those uses might seem. (Baker, 1993, p. 4)

Any understanding of the animal, and of what the animal means to us, will be informed by, and be inseparable from, our knowledge of its cultural representation. Culture shapes our reading of animals just as much as animals shape our reading of culture. It follows that the representational, symbolic and rhetorical uses of the animal must be understood to carry as much conceptual weight as any idea we may have of the 'real' animal, and must be regarded as equally significant (Baker, 1993; Geertz, 1983).

Literature Review: the animal image and culture

While the study of animal imagery promises to reveal much about the ideologies behind all human identities, the dominant Western cultural view that the subject of animals is essentially trivial is reflected in the paucity of literature generally and, where it does exist, in the focus of its research. Such studies have traditionally been associated principally with the realms of childhood or fantasy, largely confined to popular culture studies of anthropomorphic characters in children's literature and the animal image in consumptive symbolism. Or, they have belonged to the disciplines of structural and post-structural anthropology wherein the animal image is employed 'almost without exception, to explore the topic only in relation to societies and cultures other than their own', especially societies perceived as *sauvage* (Baker, 1993, p.ix). Recently, however, a small but increasing number of oppositional and negotiated readings of the cultural representations of animals have been the subject of theoretical work in history (see Baker, 1993), the history of science (see Haraway, 1989; 1997), and cultural studies (see Malamud, 1998).

Most research on the animal message in cultural texts has been conducted by scholars documenting the symbolic meaning of animal characters in literature. For example, Oswald (1995) found that children's fiction portrays dogs as protectors of humans against wild animals, and horses as having a special sense of danger that they also use to save humans. McCrindle and Odendaal (1994) examined books in South African pre-schools,

and characterised animal portrayals as ‘realistic’; ‘humanised’ (‘acted like animals, but with human traits such as human speech and thoughts’); ‘anthropomorphic’ (‘an animal presented in human form,’ such as wearing clothing); or ‘fantasy’ (‘e.g., mythical creatures, unicorns, monsters, and dragons’), (McCrindle & Odendaal, 1994, p.137).

Burt (1998) argues that the animal double (the identification of a human with an animal) is a common literary theme and that relationships with animals are often used to symbolise key passages in a child’s life, such as the passage to adulthood upon an animal’s death or the integration into society upon saving an animal from a bad situation. Other researchers have documented the symbolic meaning of animals in popular culture by examining the mix of species in the content of greeting cards (see Brabant & Mooney, 1989), the portrayal of companion animals in comic strips (see Carmack, 1997), animal themes in tabloids (see Herzog & Galvin, 1992), and the animal content in network television programming (see Church, 1996; Paul, 1996).

In their 1996 study *Regarding Animals*, Arluke and Sanders argue that humans rank animals not on the basis of biological distinction but on a socio-zoological system, or how well they seem to ‘fit in’ and play their expected roles in society. On the socio-zoological scale, ‘good’ animals, such as family pets or animals that are useful as tools, accept their subordinate place in society. They are:

visibly brought into contact with the human world - of course, on human terms ... [and] by their very behaviour, help define and reinforce the meaning of mainstream society, and are valued for this contribution. (Arluke & Sanders 1996, p. 169)

‘Bad’ animals (‘vermin’ or ‘demons’ in the form of dangerous, aggressive dogs, for example) have an unclear subordinate status and do not remain distanced from the human world: they may be killed because they are perceived as transgressive threats to the social order. Arluke and Sanders note that these social constructions are in fact moral constructions and that the construct of ‘good’ animals implies its opposite, the ‘bad’ animal. These oppositions are influential, taken-for-granted constructs that also justify our treatment of other people and serve as instruments through which we express our ‘conflicted feelings toward fellow humans’ (Arluke & Sanders, 1996, p. 186).

Brabant and Mooney (1989), in their study of the content of greeting cards, put forward more evidence that animal portrayals perpetuate racial barriers through their interpretation of the images as supporting the maintenance of racial boundaries by showing a mix of species or types only when the animals are in a public setting: when in private settings, animals were of the same species and body type. Brabant and Mooney conclude that anthropomorphism is acceptable ‘only within specific culturally defined limitations ... [reinforcing] a cultural prohibition against inter-racial interaction’ (1989, p. 492).

Arluke and Sanders posit that the place of animals in our cultural value system can be interpreted as complex and contradictory. Animals shown in multiple roles are more likely to be complex, suggesting how different species are valued and used differently and how the same species is used to symbolise different things. Their 1996 study highlights the prevalence of messages depicting both the animal as loved one

(‘humanistic’) and the animal as tool (‘utilitarian’). These messages appear at first to be contradictory, but they accord with the discrepancies of our most basic cultural definitions and, as such, are consistent with the ‘good’ animal socio-zoologic scale and a construction of nature which is afforded meaning through its necessary opposition to culture (Arluke & Sanders, 1996). Lerner and Kalof illustrate the theory thus:

We both love [animals] as family members and use them for food or work without thinking twice; we use them as symbols and allegories of the human social world as well as marking them as other. (Lerner & Kalof, 1999, p. 565)

These theories suggest that besides constructing a morally relevant distinction between humans and animals (Shapiro, 1990), human-animal relationships in Western culture function according to a belief in differences *among* animals.

Literature Review: ideology and the animal image in film

There have been studies examining the ideology of American top-grossing motion pictures (see Hirschman, 1987); and others have analysed the ideological content of films dealing with issues such as alcoholism (see Denzin 1991b; Penkoff, 1993), materialism (see Holbrook, 1988), and race relations (see Kaminsky, 1982; Omi 1989). However, until Verhoeven’s *Sheep and the Australian Cinema*, published in 2006, Hirschman and Sanders’ 1997 study, *Motion Pictures as Metaphoric Consumption: How Animal Narratives Teach Us to be Human*, remained the only analysis of the ideology presented

in English-language films portraying the relationship between people and animals. Their study examined the portrayal of animals in ten films centred on a companion animal, most usually a dog but sometimes including a cat. Treating the films' narratives as metaphors for human life as well as lessons about how we should draw boundaries between humans and animals, as well as amongst animals themselves, they found that the films addressed five themes: marking some animals as human-like and others as separate; encouraging dominant conceptions of gender roles; depicting and encouraging the formation of nuclear families and having children; dogs serving as 'surrogate parents and protectors of children and supporting cultural values of 'equality and democracy' (Hirschman & Sanders, 1997, p.59).

Further, the films studied portrayed animals in three distinct types: as utility/farm animals (treated as objects rather than individuals); as wild animals (portrayed either as friendly and helpful, dangerous and harmful, or as food/prey, and representing nature outside human control), and as pets, who were portrayed as the most analogous to humans and as such were given voice and gendered status in the narratives (Hirschman & Sanders, 1997). Arluke and Sanders (1996) also found that anthropomorphized animals were more likely to be gendered than were non-anthropomorphized animals. This finding confirms the observations of feminist scholars that gender is one of the most fundamental organising principles of human cultures (see Adams, 1990). Hirschman and Sanders similarly found that dogs, the central and heroic characters in the films they examined, were always portrayed as males (1997). These findings support another feminist insight; the male is considered the norm. When gender is unclear or unassigned, Western culture

assumes the male (Tavris, 1992).

In light of the above, Verhoeven's *Sheep in the Australian Cinema* is a unique addition to not only Australian, but also global, cultural discourse. Verhoeven explores 'the importance and implication of discourses of originality in the Australian cinema' through 'a relationship based on the observation of a set of common preoccupations in the films and linked by a representative trope: the repeated image of sheep' (Verhoeven, 2006, p.1). According to her interest in the connections between sheep-rearing and nation-building, Verhoeven focuses on two pre-Revival films: *The Squatter's Daughter* (Dir. Ken. G. Hall, 1933), and *Bitter Springs* (Dir. Ralph Smart, 1950).

Literature Review: the animal image and identity

In *Regarding Animals*, Arluke and Sanders also address the need for the sociological analysis of animals in Western society and argue that the world is:

composed of subjects-in-interaction, human and nonhuman actors cooperating and struggling with the historical, political, and cultural forces that embed their action. We join Haraway (1997, p.8) in 'insist[ing] that social relationships include nonhumans as well as humans as *socially* ... active partners'. (1996, p. 57)

One critical aspect of this social relationship is the interaction between the animal text

and its human audience. Meanings on any level, but particularly those accepted unconsciously as ‘reality’ or ‘natural’, serve as constraints, or ‘horizons of experience,’ within which people interpret their lives and interact with others (Denzin 1992, p. 28). In *Mythologies*, his seminal account of the process of naturalisation, Roland Barthes describes how something that is part of everyday life can be taken for granted so that it becomes invisible: ‘Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion’(1972, p.129). In this way, the historical and cultural are distorted and inflected so that they appear entirely natural: significance is not self-evident. As Baker observes, what is important here for the study of cultural narratives is that ‘*nothing is actually hidden*: it’s just that the culture typically deflects our attention away from these things, and makes them seem unworthy of analysis’ (Baker, 1993. Original emphasis). Attitudes towards social objects, including animal representations, are framed by the combination of the cultural messages we have absorbed and our experiences (Lerner & Kalof, 1999).

While cultural products such as film must be interrogated within their context and their relation to the ideologies of their time, cultural texts contain more than the overt message of the dominant ideology (Denzin 1992, pp. 137-143; Hall 1980, pp. 136-8). In recent years, the study of cultural texts has recognised the value of de-centred readings that consider various interpretations and highlight the diversity and complexity of meanings which can be extrapolated from popular representations (van Zoonen, 1994). Broadly speaking, these interpretative codes can be divided into *perceptual* codes or codes of visual perception (Hall, 1980, p. 132) and ideological codes, either dominant or

hegemonic, negotiated or oppositional (Hall, 1980; Morley, 1980). Both Geertz, in *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* (1975), and Darnton, in *Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint Séverin* (1985), acknowledge the examination of the animal motif as a 'chink in the culture's armour' (Baker, 1993, p. 8): a means of throwing a culture's naturalisation of itself into relief; a way of making the invisible visible.

The history of Western concepts of human-animal sociology is variously explored by, amongst others, Baker in *Picturing the Beast: Animals, Identity and Representation* (1993); Berger in *Why Look at Animals?* (1980); Ritvo in *The Animal Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (1987); Serpell in *In the Company of Animals: A Study of Human-Animal Relationships* (1986); Tester in *Animals and Society: The Humanity of Animal Rights* (1991), and Thomas in *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500-1800* (1983).

For the purposes of this study it is important to note that Western perceptions of animals have their roots in the Judeo-Christian philosophical tradition, echoed by Aristotle's (384-322 B.C.E.) concept of a natural hierarchy, which places the natural world as subservient to the interests of humanity (Thomas, 1983). The history of the cultural marginalisation of the animal, both 'real' and representational, has been traced back to Descartes (1596-1650) and his theory of the mind. In identifying a human mind or rational soul as distinct from the human body, and denying minds and souls to animals, Descartes' doctrine reduced nonhuman life to the merely mechanical (Gregory, 1987). Cartesian dualism 'internalised, *within man*, the dualism [previously] implicit in the

human relation to animals' (Berger, 1980, p. 9. Original emphasis), ultimately leading to the absolute, rather than relative, distinction between humans and non-humans that developed full expression in the industrial society of nineteenth century Europe (Berger, 1980; Ritvo, 1987). This distinction has never been fully dispelled by the imperative of scientific objectivity introduced by the Darwin/Wallace theory of evolution (first published by Darwin in 1859). As Serpell notes, 'it is difficult to escape the conclusion that human beings are still extremely reluctant to admit that the line which separates them from other species is both tenuous and fragile' (1986, p. 134).

This absolute distinction denies the relation of human/animal commonality acknowledged by Lévi-Strauss, mentioned above, as necessary to the consideration of human identity and the matrices of nature and culture. Stuart Hall, in his introduction to *Questions of Cultural Identity*, supports the importance of the recognition of such parallelisms when he asserts that:

Above all, and directly contrary to the form in which they are constantly invoked, identities are constructed *through, not outside, difference* [Emphasis added]. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that it is only through the relation to the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what it lacks, to what has been called its *constitutive outside* [Original emphasis.] that the 'positive' meaning of any term - and thus its 'identity' - can be constructed. (1996, pp. 4 -5)

Hall calls on Laclau to argue that 'the constitution of a social identity is an act of power', for:

an identity's constitution is always based on excluding

something and establishing a violent hierarchy between the two resultant poles - man/woman, etc. What is peculiar to the second term is thus reduced to the function of an accident as opposed to the essentiality of the first. (1996, p. 33)

The story of Adam and Eve in the Judeo-Christian Old Testament provides a good example of this. Eve, the first woman, is *introduced* as a mere adjunct, her very existence contingent upon the donation of a rib from the 'essential' Adam (Genesis 2:18-25). Similarly, the survival of the entire animal kingdom is depicted as being contingent upon the skills of the 'essential' Noah: his ability to build a flood-worthy Ark and to furnish it with a pair of each species (Genesis 6-8).

The denial of the relation of human/animal commonality which has resulted in the cultural marginalisation of animals can thus be seen as a function of dominant social identity in its struggle to maintain power by resisting destabilisation. While modern¹ humans continue to use animals as the 'necessary, even if silenced and unspoken other, that which it "lacks"' (Hall, 1996, p. 5), the overriding impetus of the dominant identity is to maintain an impression of impregnable internal homogeneity, a false unity 'constructed within the play of power and exclusionthe result, not of a natural and inevitable or primordial totality [of identity] but of the naturalized, over determined process of "closure"' (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1992). For Hall, not only the animal 'other', but *all* dichotomies of identity, are understood to exert a recursive pressure on the dominant pole that continually threatens to break through the shell of a culture's

¹ 'Modern' and 'modernity' here is taken to refer to 'modes of behaviour established first of all in post-feudal Europe', or what is now generally termed 'the industrial world' (Giddens, 1991, p. 14-15).

naturalisation of itself. Therefore:

‘identities’ can only be read against the grain - that is to say, specifically *not* as that which fixes the play of difference in a point of origin and stability, but as that which is constructed in or through *différance*² and is constantly destabilized by what it leaves out (Hall, 1996, p.5. Original emphasis)

This ‘fictive unity’ (Souter cited in Hall, 1996, p. 16) is seen to pose serious problems for theorising the concept of self-identity, and Hall goes on to address them for the remainder of the chapter. However, the concept of national or cultural identity need not be similarly compromised. While concepts of self-identity are understood to require certain levels of self-referential psychic coherence in order to function, the cognition of mass identities is necessarily, to a greater or lesser degree, speculative in nature, thus admitting more ‘play’ or leeway in their perception or recognition. As Butler contends:

Identifications are never fully and finally made; they are incessantly reconstituted, and, as such, are subject to the volatile logic of iterability. They are that which is constantly marshalled, consolidated, retrenched, contested and, on occasion, compelled to give way. (1993, p. 105)

Identities arise from the narrativisation of the self: self-identity by a reflexive sense of biographic continuity; national identity or culture by the history of its representations as expressed in narrative. Identities are, therefore, formed *within* representation (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1996; Turner, 1986). For the modern or post-colonial world, which is

² Untranslatable neologism coined by Derrida and generally used to destabilise meaning. Neither a word nor a concept, neither a verb nor a noun, *différance* can be understood to refer to *difference*, *differ*, *defer*, *differing*, and *deferring*.

concerned as much with 'the invention of tradition as much as tradition itself' (Hall, 1996, p. 4) this narrativisation is a construct of both past and *future* representations, a process of:

becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves. (Hall, 1996, p. 4)

In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Giddens identifies nature, and by extension, animals, as an important dichotomy of modern identity. He argues that the motivations of modernity and its primary concern of 'colonising' the future, and the resultant need to exert control over nature, fosters an ideology which, at base, perpetuates a fallacious divide between 'social' and 'natural' referents. He identifies an important 'horizon of experience' (Denzin 1992, p. 28) or constraint of meaning as 'the end of nature' (Giddens, 1991, p. 144). The natural environment can only be perceived as a known, manageable 'other', for apperception of immediate, 'natural' experience necessarily embeds the self in the concrete time and place of the present, thus threatening to diminish the importance of the anticipated future. Modern identity is here also seen as a reflexive projection of the social self: 'we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (Giddens, 1991, p. 75). According to Giddens, the construct of modern identity is bound by an internalised referential system based on knowledge and power. In addition:

the internal referentiality of modern social life has often been confused with a distinction drawn between 'society' and 'nature'; and, correspondingly, such referentiality has often been thought of as intrinsic to all social systems, rather than primarily to the institutions of modernity. (Giddens, 1991, p. 144)

The concept of 'nature' itself has been distorted and inflected by the human need for control so that it is only perceived and understood as a complement and support for society's aspirations. The modern projection of the self no longer admits to being a part of nature and the power of the same/different 'other' is denied. Once again, nature and the animal 'other' are indicated as a key representational elements in the deconstruction of the naturalisation of identity.

Within the wider scope of Giddens's arguments as set out in *Modernity and Self-Identity*, from the time of white settlement, Australia can be perceived as a truly modern country, in the sense that 'modernity' is defined as a situation in which individuals have become separated from their 'original' nature and operate in a state of 'existential isolation' (Giddens, 1991, pp. 6-9). Accordingly, difference, exclusion and marginalisation are all forces that have, historically, been at work within Australian narratives and representations. Hall identifies the margins as the locus of the uncontainable excess that breaks through the constructed boundaries of dominant identities (Hall, 1996, p.5). Recent research has already found that animal images and representations in popular culture reinforce human gender and racial boundaries, and indicates that further analysis would likely reveal a connection between animal symbolism and the portrayal of ambivalent feelings towards marginal or outgroups, including the criminal, the insane and the ill (Arluke & Sanders, 1996, Brabant & Mooney, 1989; Lerner & Kalof, 1999).

Metaphor has been identified as a significant instrument for interpreting cultural

narratives (Fernandez, 1991; Urban, 1991), especially those featuring animals as principal characters (Turner 1991; Willis 1990). In *Picturing the Beast*, Baker goes on to highlight the importance of distinguishing between metaphor and metonymy, and of recognising the rhetorical opposition of the two, as first applied by Lévi-Strauss, in *The Savage Mind*, in his description of structural relations:

The *metaphor: metonymy* opposition has quite specific advantages as an analytical tool which ... [is] nowhere more evident than in the study of animal images of human identity (1993, p. 83. Original emphasis)

The opposition of metaphoric and metonymic modes of figurative expression have been employed by writers in the semiotic or structuralist tradition, such as Barthes and Lévi-Strauss in order to:

characterize the distinction between those forms of substitution in which one thing is likened to another (metaphor), and those in which a thing is used to stand for another by reason of its being uniquely associated with it (metonym). (Baker, 1993, p.84)

Baker proposes ‘a correspondence between this *metaphor: metonymy* opposition and some of the visual strategies typically used in our culture to articulate the distinction between self and others, subject and object, humanity and animality’ (Baker, 1993, p. 84).

Metaphor and metonymy are effected by the mental transference of characteristics associated with one concept or domain of experience to a second concept or domain of experience (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The use of metaphor or metonymy as a form of

discourse thus requires ‘an understanding of the *cultural context* in which the metaphor [or metonymy] is being invoked’ (Hirschman & Sanders, 1997, p. 55. Original emphasis). Particular metaphors and metonymies develop and are applied in discourse because they provide ‘satisfying mappings onto *already existing cultural understandings*’ or domains of experience (Quinn, 1991, p. 65. Emphasis added). Metaphors arising from one cultural context may be rendered unintelligible in another if the domains of experience differ.

Methodology and Structure

This study analyses the representation of animals and human-animal interactions in selected Australian films from 1971 to 2001. The images and the narratives of the films were interpreted using qualitative methods grounded ontologically in a mixed method semiotic approach, whereby themes or structures of meaning that reveal the ideology of the creating culture are identified within the content of the narrative (Holbrook & Hirschman, 1993). All representational modes were considered: image, symbol, analogy, allegory, metaphor or metonymy. Where appropriate, cultural, psychological and behavioural theories from reception studies have been employed to describe or decode textual effects. Analysis of the representations included their function in the *mise-en-*

*scène*³, cinematography⁴, editing, dialogue, diegetic⁵ and non-diegetic⁶ sound, and film form.

The discussion addresses overt messages and alternate interpretations. The dominant/hegemonic or ‘taken-for-granted assumptions’ are interpreted from the ‘social reflection’ perspective (Kapsis, 1991, p. 68), which holds that films display a national ‘psyche’; with film content reflecting audience taste preferences, themselves produced by changes in society. Where pertinent, interpretations were made within Thomas Elsaesser’s ‘social imaginary’ theory (1984), which includes both the text and the extra-textual factors of the industrial, technological and political history of the process of its creation in the analysis.

The films were analysed as open-ended metaphors in the tradition of Stern (1990), and Hirschman and Sanders (1997), in order to facilitate nuanced responses to the heterogeneity inherent in the texts. In the reading of cultural texts, Stern posits that this approach elicits:

an indefinite number of shared resemblances between two things that are more similar than dissimilar. These allow the reader to figure out the transferable qualities alluded to

³ Behaviour of figures or action, setting, lighting and costume (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 432).

⁴ How something is filmed: the photographic aspects of the shot, the framing of the shot and the duration of the shot (Bordwell and Thompson, 2001, p. 429).

⁵ Any voice, music or sound effect presented as originating within the space of the narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 430).

⁶ Any voice, music or sound effect presented as originating outside the space of the narrative (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 430).

rather than stated and in so doing generate a many-sided meaning in his/her mind. They give the reader leeway to fill in numerous possible relationships between a subject and object seen more alike than not, and to find clusters of resemblances ... They permit multilayered, complex and connotative wide-ranging interpretation ... (Stern, 1990, p. 73)

This approach allows for negotiated readings which incorporate contradictory interpretations into the dominant code, and oppositional readings by viewing the text through an alternative, non-traditional, framework (Denzin, 1992).

This study is confined to live-action representations of animals, not necessarily as central figures, in Australian feature films. While it is recognised that animation allows for greater creative expression in the development of anthropomorphic features transferred onto animal protagonists (Thomas & Johnson, 1981), and that such narratives have much to say about human identity (Baker, 1993), it is proposed that representations most specific to Australian identity are found more readily in the margins; in the narratives of live-action films depicting animal images and interactions between humans and animals based in the aesthetic of realism.

The films chosen for analysis were selected across three decades of release, from 1971 to 2001. The rationale informing the selection was that of eclecticism. Within the three-decade boundary, the range of the films considered include those recognised as forerunners to the Revival (e.g. *Walkabout* and *Wake in Fright*); classics of the Revival (e.g. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*); Australian produced international commercial successes (e.g. *The Man From Snowy River* and *Crocodile*

Dundee); as well as films which have fallen off the radar of recent Australian film commentary (e.g. *Mad Dog Morgan* and *Long Weekend*), and those that never made it into the matrix of intellectual representational discourse (e.g. *Howling III: The Marsupials* and *Razorback*). This approach was adopted in order to provide illustrations of the main hypothesis through a range of narrative themes and genres.

Chapter 1 focuses on the discussion of a single film, *Walkabout*. The analysis in this section functions as an exemplar of the many ways in which an animal-centred reading can uncover new modes of signification and the discussion explores the attendant connotations, denotations or themes which result. *Walkabout* was chosen as the anchoring text for this study for several reasons. It is widely recognised as an influential precursor to the Australian cinema Revival of the mid-1970s, and the themes and visual style it introduces are echoed in many subsequent films. The explicit theme of *Walkabout* is that of the nature/culture dichotomy, therefore the text provides a rich site for investigation into representations of animals and Australian identity.

Chapter 2 explores the theme of landscape and emerging nationhood through the analysis of films set in and around the period of Federation; *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *My Brilliant Career*, *We of the Never Never*, and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. The backgrounding discussion outlines the history of the concept of the sublime in the context of white Australian aesthesia, and the subsequent textual analyses illustrate one of key arguments of this dissertation: the connection between the traditional interpretations of the films and the ethos of the commentary conferring signification upon them. Analyses of *The*

Goddess of 1967 and *Japanese Story* illustrate the modern shift in the representation of marginalised protagonists, and through textual comparison, the role of the animal image in articulations of national belonging.

The discussion in Chapter 3 focuses on human-animal representations in narratives portraying the qualities defining white Australian congruence with the landscape, through the analysis of *The Man From Snowy River*, *Crocodile Dundee*, *Mad Dog Morgan*, and *The Adventures of Priscilla Queen of the Desert*. The role of the animal as signifier of the differing topographies of the films' settings is examined, as well as the nature of the human-activities activities employed to portray man's relationship with his environment. All of the films feature male protagonists, so the traditional interpretations of the characterisations of male identity that these films offer are also reconsidered through an animal-centred framework.

Chapter 4 examines the mode of animal portrayals in Australian horror films. The qualities identified as specific to the Australian Gothic aesthetic are discussed in relation to its function in the representation of horror, together with the concept's demarcating role in the classification of Australian-produced horror films in dominant commentary. Analyses of *Howling III: The Marsupials* and *Razorback* establish the indigenous/feral dichotomy as an important organising principle in expressions of identity through animal imagery.

Chapter 5 continues with the examination of the horror genre, with emphasis on

representations of the human-animal relationship as expressions of social transgression, sexual deviancy or psychological imbalance. The illustrations provided by the analysis of *Wake in Fright*, *Long Weekend* and *Bad Boy Bubby* in the discussion also introduce the hypothesis that, as cinematic metaphor, the animal image simultaneously works to universalise narratives as well as to define them within a specific culture or location.

In the concluding section of this dissertation, the findings of the study are reviewed and the conclusions drawn linked with the main thesis of my argument. The discussion includes the limitations of this investigation and suggestions of areas for further research. Finally, I outline the wider implications of the conclusions and the contribution that the textual approach exemplified in this study can make to Australian cultural criticism within film studies and the discourse on Australian representation in the production national cinema.

Two DV discs of supporting film excerpts are appended. The relevant excerpts are indicated in the text and correspond to the disc menus. Example excerpts for chapters 1, 2 and 3 can be found on disc one: for chapters 4 and 5 on disc two.

Hypotheses:

This study addresses the following research questions. Firstly, what insights into the articulations of identity in Australian film can the analysis of representations of animals

and human-animal interactions provide? Secondly, could the representation of animals be seen to fall into any thematic or ideological categories, and if so, could these categories shed light on the specific problematics of Australian representation and identity? Thirdly, could the analysis of the representation of animals in Australian films reveal new, negotiated or oppositional readings of the selected films?

I propose that a focus on the human-animal representations in discrete texts reveals more nuanced meanings that have been admitted previously in dominant commentary. In line with Baker (1993), I go on to argue that investigation of the animal motif is indeed a powerful tool for uncovering ideological encodings previously hidden through cultural naturalisation, and that the fresh significations revealed in the narratives by employing this method promise to reflect the social development in the concept of Australian identity and representation.

Chapter 1

The nature/culture dichotomy: the animal heart of *Walkabout*

This chapter will focus on the discussion of one film: *Walkabout*. Through conducting a detailed analysis of the animal symbolism and the human/animal representations in a single text, the aim is to illustrate a variety of ways in which an animal-centred negotiated reading can uncover new perceptual and ideological codes. The connections of these meanings to the broader interpretative framework of cinematic representations of Australian identity will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

Despite claims by academics and journalists, articulated in the 1960s' dialogues of incitation for an Australian film industry, that overseas directors would be unable to give cinematic expression to that 'sense of identity which a community's own film-making confers upon it as nothing else can' (Lawson, 1965), *Walkabout*, directed by English Nicholas Roeg, and *Wake in Fright*, directed by Canadian Ted Kotcheff, both released in 1971, remain regarded as two of the most apperceptive films made in Australia, notwithstanding their lack of local box-office success (Molloy, 1990a, p. xiii; Nowra, 2003). In both films, animal representations are used to highlight and compare cultural structures (see Chapter 5 for a full discussion of *Wake in Fright*). As McFarlane observes of *Walkabout*: 'Several decades later it remains one of the most imaginative films made in this country' (1999, p. 521).

Walkabout effects an insistently elegiac evocation of a journey through the Australian landscape within which the Aboriginal and Western relationship between humans and animals is explored as two children return to nature. Roeg invokes the animal image, often with irony, both atmospherically and ideologically. Roeg's direction and cinematography reinvests the animal image with an objectivity and power counter to the subjective representations characteristic of the films before the Revival, thereby elevating the animal image to the overriding motif of the film. Traditional interpretations of the film centre on the themes of rites of passage and the difficulty of communication between cultures. While these themes remain, close and sustained analyses of both the cinematographic and the narrative representations of animals in *Walkabout* reveal a more complex message: that of the human relationship with animals and nature as the key to being *truly* civilized, in the sense of having highly developed spiritual and cultural resources, in addition to the material and the political. The aim of the approach taken in this study is to uncover the specific elements that combine to give *Walkabout* its enduring resonance beyond the abstract evaluations - such as 'poetic' and 'disturbing' (McFarlane & Mayer, 1992); or 'eerie' and 'ethereal' (Peary, 1989) - most commonly offered by commentators. Further, it will be argued that *Walkabout* should be regarded as a watershed film within the history of animal symbolism and identity as represented in Australian film.

It is interesting to note that *Walkabout* was adapted from James Vance Marshall's children's novel. Like animal imagery, children's literature has long been marginalized as being of inferior cultural value. As Ursula Le Guin comments:

Critical terror of Kiddilit [*sic*] is common. People to whom sophistication is a positive intellectual value shun anything 'written for children'. ... In literature as in 'real life', women, children and animals are obscure matter upon which Civilization erects itself, phallogically. (1990, p. 10)

Roeg uses a narrative of the marginalised (Aborigines, children, animals) as a canvas for his exploration of the meaning of 'civilization'. A reading which centres the animal image is able to approach the true complexity of this text, for it uncovers the animal image as 'the spanner in the workings' that is able to subvert the 'self- identifications of the dominant culture' (Baker, 1993, p. 125).

The use of extreme close-up images employed by Roeg in *Walkabout* marks a significant stylistic move away from previous representations of animals in narrative film. Tracing the development of the changing nature of the representations of the landscape in Australian television series and documentaries, Carter identifies the emergence, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, of what he terms the 'ecological perspective' in which 'for the first time, the land itself became the primary subject, the landscape as ecology' (1998, p. 23). The ecological perspective resulted from the correlation between technological advances in film and sound equipment and changing cultural attitudes. Lightweight hand-held cameras with synchronised sound recording equipment could be used without tripods. According to Carter, this allowed for the presentation 'of a quite new relationship between the human and natural world' (1998, p. 23), with the focus on the details of the 'small-scale': 'ants, insects, lizards, small rodents, anything that lived

under a rock or in a hollow tree, animate and inanimate drawn together into the one relationship' (1998, p. 23). In *Walkabout*, Roeg makes full use of these technological advancements to introduce the use of the extreme close-up in the presentation of the 'small-scale' animal image in Australian feature films in the mode of the ecological perspective.

The function of the extreme close-ups in the film can be framed within reception study theory, taking into account the cultural, psychological and behavioural factors at work in their signification (Bordwell & Thompson, 2002, pp. 220-221). The observations provided by this approach have immediate relevancy to the differing interpretations that these images offer in *Walkabout*. Persson stresses the extreme close-ups' functions or effects as those of either, or both, threat and intimacy, and he quotes Meyrowitz in vivid illustration: 'Intimate space ... is the distance of both lovemaking and murder!' (Meyrowitz, 1986, p. 261, cited in Persson, 1998, p. 24). As Persson notes, the effects of threat or shock produced in the use of close-ups have been well documented and identified variously as resulting from visual representations which are 'jolting and excessive', 'aggressive' or 'confrontational' (Gunning, 1994, p. 294; Olsson, 1996, p. 34; Gunning, 1990, p. 101, cited in Persson, 1998, p. 28). A quote of Eisenstein's on the subject is particularly pertinent to the topic of this thesis as a whole: 'A cockroach filmed in close-up seems on the screen a hundred times more terrible than a hundred elephants captured in long shot' (1974/1940, p. 112).

The effect of the extreme close-up is also linked with intimacy; with the 'intensity'

(Epstein, 1988/1921, p. 235) of the image effecting ‘greater “involvement”’ (Branigan, 1984, p. 6). Persson’s thesis links these effects with socio-psychological research on ‘proxemic behaviour’ or the role of ‘personal space’ and distance in ‘real life’ human interaction. Personal space or spatial behaviour has both a ‘protective’ function and a ‘communicative’ function. In proxemic theory, the distance of intimacy ranges from 0 to 18 inches, and Persson claims that:

The intensifier-of-contents effects of the close-up device, are the results of the interaction between image and spectator’s real world interpersonal distance behaviour ... More specifically ... the image triggers the same mental processes and behaviour as would a real world invasion into the spectator’s personal space. (1998, p. 34. Original emphasis)

As in real-life, the personal space invasion of a cinematic close-up can either connote a threat or a communicative function in its intimacy, depending on the context and the mode of presentation. Within this theory, while the animal image is often cited in examples of the protective function, as the ‘dread’ element whose transgression of the spatial boundaries initiates the protective response, the emphasis on the ‘communicative’ function in the matrix is situated solely within human representations. When the animal image is included into the communicative function, however, the theory sheds light on the power of the animal imagery in *Walkabout*. I propose, and will go on to discuss with illustrative examples, that many of the close-up animal representations in *Walkabout* are remarkable for the ways in which the cinematographic treatments present a spatial or optical proximity that evokes a non-threatening intimacy. Persson explains that ‘whereas the threat close-up seems to invade the personal space of the *spectator*, the intimacy

close-up enables the spectator to invade the *characters'* personal space' (1998, p 36. Original emphasis). In *Walkabout*, both the aspects of spectator threat and character invasion – the 'characters' in this instance being the animals – are avoided through the compositional properties of the representations.

Traditional interpretations of *Walkabout's* imagery, or *imaginary*, often serve to identify the film according to the 'dread' potential of the close-up animal representations; as 'potent distillations of the threat of [the] landscape' (McFarlane, 1999, p. 521), thus placing it, along with Rayner, within the category of Australian 'horror' or the Australian Gothic genre (Rayner, 2000, p. 25. See chapter 4 for a detailed discussion of the Australian Gothic genre). Yet, the framing, the editing and the use of sound in the film all work to present animal images which suggest the *possibility* of communication. The intimacy of these close-ups is more akin to that most usually associated with human-to-human interaction, in which the spatial transgression allows for 'processes of psychologicalization connected to the perception of character' through the reading of non-verbal body language (Persson, 1998, p. 29).

Throughout the film, many of the animals, including insects and arachnids, are portrayed as the *observing* rather than the observed, an effect achieved through crosscuts and cut-ins, implying the animals' awareness of the humans without the obverse. In such sequences, the children are often depicted from the creatures' point of view, adding to the effect, while the creatures themselves face the camera, sometimes moving towards it, and sometimes locking gaze with the lens (*Appendix: compilation 1*). These portrayals work in

reversal to the ideology of the 'modern urban-symbolic' as theorised by Baker, in which representations of animals are reduced to subjective spectacle; victim to the empowered gaze (Baker, 1993, pp.13-14). As Berger explains the phenomenon:

animals are always the observed. The fact that they can observe us has lost all significance. They are the objects of our ever-extending knowledge. What we know about them is an index of our power, and thus an index of what *separates us* from them. (1980, p.14. Emphasis added)

In *Walkabout*, many of the animals have been re-invested with their secrets and power through the mode of their representation. Yet they are not threatening. They are visual articulations of Derrida's notion of the *always already there* (Derrida, 1976). Although Derrida's argument revolves around the use of language, his insistence on the necessity of the recognition of the quality of concealment or secrecy, in the self-identity of the signified imperative to the communicative act, applies with equal force to the animal imagery in *Walkabout*.

As the lost Girl and White Boy traverse the landscape, before they meet the Aboriginal Black Boy, they are oblivious to the animals all around. It is as if the animals are invisible to them precisely because they are alien or unknown. Their otherness or exteriority is such that they do not exist in the children's internal frame of reference (*Appendix: compilation II*). The animals have not been encoded with any signification; they are truly meaningless in the sense that they cannot be conceptualised, being beyond language and therefore beyond thought (see Derrida, 1976). The intimacy offered by the

animal images is not one of threat, because the relationship they present to the audience is tempered by the contrariety of their diegetic relationship to the children: one of mutual disinterest. The promise of communication is offered to the audience alone. Nowra appears to have intuited this effect when he describes the animals as possessing a 'fairytale brightness' (Nowra, 2003, p. 6). The landscapes in *Walkabout* are 'surreal' or 'hallucinogenic' in their intensity (Nowra, 2003, p. 6; Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p 82), largely as a result of these representations. For in his particular use of the close-up, Roeg imbues the animal image with a physical immediacy and vivacity that is so fresh in the context of narrative cinema that it reads as fantastical.

The notion of the animals' levels of visual communication iterates one of the themes of the film. As the children progress along their journey, the White Boy is seen to have the capacity to not only communicate with the Black Boy, but also to find signification in the environment and the animals within it, and to interact with them accordingly. In contrast, the only time the Girl is seen to interact with nature is towards the end of the film, when they have found the abandoned homestead and she knows that she is not far from civilization. A butterfly lands on her arm and she takes the time to contemplate it. But even this engagement suggests a dreamy disregard. The Girl focuses on the butterfly to avoid interaction with the Black Boy: she is thinking of other things - her return home perhaps - but she is not appreciating the insect for the integrity of its own being. This is articulated in the cinematography. In the sequence, the butterfly remains as a symbolic adjunct to the human form of the Girl. In comparison with the other close-up images of animals in the film, the butterfly presents as a pallid cliché, lacking the vivid physicality

embodied in the other representations (*Appendix: excerpt III*). Through such comparison, this image highlights another effect achieved by the differing compositional elements used in the extreme close-ups of most of the 'small-scale' animals elsewhere in the film. In the frame, while the animals are contextualised within their immediate surroundings, they are often imaged in a *mise-en-scène* devoid of any reference to scale. They are represented in the fullness of their existence; with an existential integrity (seemingly) uncompromised by any subjectivity. They are presented in the immediate present, neither as imminent prey nor as imminent hunter; but simply as *always already there* (*Appendix: compilation IV*).

Roeg also uses extreme close-up images of insects at work to signal the potential, and to highlight the process of, the decay of food, animals, and humans, thereby foregrounding the concept of decomposition as natural transformation. At the beginning of the film, the Girl squashes and brushes ants off the freshly laid table-cloth as she sets out the picnic the children are to have in the outback with their father. The futility of this gesture is signalled by a close-up of the ants reclaiming the food after the father has shot himself and the picnic has been abandoned. More poignantly, the Girl repeats this gesture at the end of the film as she leaves the body of the Black Boy, after he has hanged himself in a tree (*Appendix: compilation V*). Like the butterfly sequence, these scenes illustrate the Girl's disconnection with the environment.

The evaporation of the Sweet Quandong oasis is foreshadowed by a close-up of a witchetty grub noisily consuming a quandong fruit, effecting the transformation of one

flesh into another. The creature's maggot-like appearance provides the irony here, for in the Aboriginal culture they are about to enter into, the grub is a prized source of protein, yet it is unrecognised as food by the starving children (*Appendix: excerpt VI*). At the children's first encounter with the Black Boy on his walkabout, the initial close-ups focus on the dead lizards, abuzz with flies, tied to the Black Boy's loin thong. He holds a lizard up to the children, who recoil from the offer. Once again, the children's cultural notions of edible and inedible prevent them from seeing the food for the flies (*Appendix: excerpt VII*).

It is only towards the end of the film that Roeg offers an image of decomposition as full process, in a time-lapse sequence of maggots consuming a fallen water-buffalo. The image relates to the despair of the Black Boy as he returns empty-handed from hunting, his efforts thwarted by the sudden appearance of two white men in a utility vehicle firing at his quarry. The following sequence, however, re-establishes the full complexity of the Aboriginal relation to animals by depicting the symbolic and ritualistic, while pointing to the final outcome of decomposition. To the accompaniment of indigenous ceremonial music, the camera pans for several seconds over an expanse of picked-clean, bleached-white water-buffalo bones before alighting on the prostrate figure of the Black Boy in ritual body paint and feathers. In this way, the Aborigine is seen to experience and represent the dualism of the pre-capitalist human-animal relationship in which animals 'were subjected *and* worshipped, bred *and* sacrificed' (Berger, 1980, p.5. Original emphasis). It is within this sequence that the complexity of the representation of animals in *Walkabout* is most explicitly set out: in images that tell of animals as not merely 'meat

or leather or horn' but also as 'messengers and promises' (Berger, 1980, p. 2). After the death of the Black Boy, once the children have left the house, the image of a decomposing bush turkey speaks of the broken promise of his expectations (*Appendix: compilation VIII*).

This motif of dualism is also exemplified in the scenes at the quandong oasis that the children come across just as their energies are becoming exhausted. Here is the story of the Fall in reverse. The White Boy is the first to take a bite of the quandong fruit and whisper: 'It tastes lovely'. As the children go to sleep under their picnic-cloth bower, the scene is crosscut with images of the sunset over the desert and a mid-shot of the quandong tree bearing two snakes silhouetted against the evening sky. There follows a zoom shot from the sleeping children's faces to the upper branches of the tree: a snake's point of view. The snakes are presented as empowered observers. The accompanying percussive sound of snake-like rattles is too powerful to remain diegetic to the scene. The sound suggests a pre-lapsarian animality that is abstract, coming from a space and time beyond the modern imagination and reclaiming the pre-Cartesian symbolic relation between humans and animals.

In the film, the young White Boy acts as an intermediary between the two cultures. His difference is mostly portrayed through his ease, compared with his older sister's, in adopting the animal as symbolic in the Aboriginal way. During their night under the bower, he is symbolically anointed to his role by a passing wombat that approaches and sniffs his hair. Again, this scene is shot from the animal's eye-line level and the wombat's

exit is straight towards the camera. A much stronger expression of the White Boy's duality is offered in the scene where the Black Boy smears animal blood on the White Boy to soothe his sunburnt shoulders. In this manner, the White Boy is seen to meld with the animal other in a way that his sister never does. This relationship is illustrated again later in the film when the children are rock-painting. Both the Black Boy and the White Boy sport exuberant body-paint (the White Boy an emu and a kangaroo on his torso), while the Girl displays a more restrained snake around her arm. With echoes of the biblical allusions previously introduced, the symbol more readily links the Girl to the animal imaginary of the non-indigenous (*Appendix: compilation IX*).

Questions of human identity and the passage from nature to culture have long been imagined through the parallelism of animal and human life (Berger, 1980, p. 5). Modern Western culture constructs the animal as absolutely 'other', and by association those who identify with the animals themselves come to be seen as 'other' (Baker, 1993, p 124). The Black Boy first appears on the screen swooping across the horizon with animalistic exuberance as he hunts a lizard. In close-up he is seen, encircled by flies, with lizards hanging open-mouthed from around his waist; a melange of the human and the animal (*Appendix: excerpt X*).

The Black Boy's relationship with nature and animals is strongly expressed in the scenes in which he hunts, kills and cooks a kangaroo. The hunting sequence begins with a montage of stills; close-up shots of a bird, a snake, and a kangaroo, interspersed with images of the Black Boy's body and hands, including the raw, bloody image of him

pulling the sinew out of an animal limb. This montage works to draw attention to the symbolic nature of the following sequence as an overriding motif of the film. The juxtaposition of images suggests the universalisation of the situation to include the Aboriginal relationship with nature as a whole, above and beyond an ostensibly anthropologically correct account of Aboriginal hunting.

The detail of the portrayal, from his preparations in licking his armpit as he steadies to take aim, through to the realistically-paced chase, articulates the Black Boy's pre-Cartesian empathy with the animal necessary for success in hunting. This representation conveys a sense of equality between humans and animals by evoking Darwinism and the notion that people and animals are related through their descent from one common ancestor. Typical hunters and gatherers view the animals they hunt as mental and spiritual equals, sometimes superiors, capable of conscious thoughts and feelings analogous to those of humans (Levine, 1971, pp. 426-427). Conversely, this depiction of the Black Boy hunting, like other representations in the film, is also one which breaches the human-animal divide, as conceived by an anthropocentric modern Western culture, in which 'humanity' is defined by *what animals are not* (Clarke & Linzey, 1990). Within this framework, the animal is constructed as absolutely 'other', and by association, those who identify with the animal themselves come to be seen as culturally inferior and marginalised.

Throughout *Walkabout*, Roeg represents this duality in images of the Black Boy and, as the film progresses, in those of the White Boy also. The later sequences highlight this

duality as a more complex way of being; a higher form of civilization subtle enough to include the society of the natural world, for example, when the elegance of the kangaroo chase is contrasted with the water-buffalo hunting sequence towards the end of the film.

The representation of the hunted kangaroo itself challenges notions of the consumable by breaching the modern Western need for distancing from the animal to effect edibility (Maccoby 1982, p. 50). The length and detail of the hunting sequence, both visually and aurally, in which the efforts of the kangaroo take on equal importance with those of the Black Boy, results in an intimacy with the animal. The kangaroo is voiced: as the exhausted kangaroo hides behind a bush, we hear a squeal. The following shot of the stalking Black Boy is from the kangaroo's viewpoint. The kangaroo is heard to squeal again over a close-up of the Black Boy's intent face. There follows a close-up of the kangaroo's head and upper-body, suggesting parity at this decisive moment. As the thrown spear makes contact, the kangaroo is once again voiced, this time with a lower-pitched sound, recognisable as a death-cry, for it resonates with representations of the sound of human death itself (*Appendix: excerpt XI*).

Roeg offers a complete contrast to the Aboriginal relationship between the hunter and the hunted in the water-buffalo hunting sequence. In a graceful dance, the Black Boy wrestles a young water-buffalo to the ground. As he raises his club to deliver the killing blow, a shot of the advancing water-buffalo herd and the sound of running hooves momentarily suggest an intervention of nature. However, the sound of a truck engine supersedes that of the animals, and the Black Boy is forced to let go of his quarry and roll

away to safety as the vehicle speeds past in a cloud of dust. In this sequence, the Black Boy is portrayed, like the environment itself, as a victim of white Australian disregard. Several shots of a dead water-buffalo, thrown in the back of the ute, slashed-throat agape, foreshadow the subsequent depiction of the Western relationship between the hunter and the hunted.

This sequence operates as an inversion of the Black Boy's kangaroo chase, articulating the Western practice of emotional and spiritual distancing from the killing of an animal. The white hunters pull to a halt at the edge of the marsh. One man is handed a rifle and he steadies himself to take aim at the lone water-buffalo standing centre-stage in the middle distance. A shot is heard. The killing is viewed from the gunman's point of view. The water-buffalo collapses instantaneously. The sound of the shot is heard again and again as a sound-over to a montage of startled and running animals (birds, a possum, donkeys, kangaroos, water-buffalo), and the face of the Black Boy, interspersed with the repeated image of the collapsing water-buffalo. This image, which continues as a motif through the subsequent montage, is shown in increasing close-up. The animal faces the camera/gun and locks gaze as, simultaneously, its legs collapse inwardly in a disarray of powerlessness. The white hunters' kill involves no chase or moment of parity. Intimacy at the moment of death is contrived cinematically for the non-diegetic audience alone (*Appendix: excerpt XII*).

The second montage following the shooting of the water-buffalo begins after a sequence showing the White Boy walking, once again emphasising his true connection to nature and the Black Boy. A non-diegetic bird-like screech over a shot of a spider skittering out

of frame heralds a sequence in which birds, feral pigs and kangaroos are seen to take flight and run, with each shot ending in a freeze-frame. Ominous percussion echoes as a sound-over for each representation. The image of the collapsing water-buffalo is replayed in reverse, but the animal only stands to be shot again (*Appendix: excerpt XIII*).

In focussing on the shooting of the animal in this way, and repeatedly highlighting the surrounding consequences, the film appears to go beyond its exploration of the theme of nature as a value concept to comment on a greater issue; the consequences of the loss of the symbolic relation between humans and animals. The sequence implies that this breach threatens not the environment, but also to our very existence within it. This is the end of the trio's journey within the Eden of a true animal kingdom, a journey which can be interpreted as articulating that which Berger identifies as 'that aspect of human inwardness which has remained natural, or at least tends or longs to become natural once more' and in which 'the life of a wild animal becomes an ideal, an ideal internalised as a feeling surrounding a repressed desire' (Berger, 1980, p.15). The image of the white hunter quickly and efficiently sharpening his blade, then slashing the water-buffalo's throat to bleed it, symbolises the completion of the return to the world in which animals are dispossessed of their power and secrets.

In *Walkabout*, the human-animal practices depicted function as a site of struggle over the representation of cultural difference. As Elder, Wolch and Emel observe:

Animal practices are a powerful basis for creating difference and hence racialization . . . This process of animal-linked racialization works to sustain the power of

dominant groups over others and deny their legitimacy as citizens. While universally understood in literal terms, the divide is a shifting, metaphorical line, built up on the basis of human-animal interaction patterns, ideas about the hierarchies of living things, and the symbolic roles played by specific animals in society. Certain sorts of animals (such as apes, companion animals, or other revered species) become positioned on the human side of this metaphorical line, rendering some practices unacceptable. Animal practices have become tools of cultural imperialism designed to de-legitimize citizenship ... animal practices, interpreted as 'out of place' by dominant groups, position subaltern groups at the very edge of humanity. (1998, ¶5)

The theme of animal consumption and edibility is introduced in the opening minute of the film as a montage of scenes of city life, and the main protagonists' existence within it, are incongruously cross-cut with a shot of the outback and a sign advertising kangaroo for sale as pet meat, a close-up of a butcher handling first minced-meat, and then chicken. This leitmotif of Western versus Aboriginal butchery is developed later in the film. As the Black Boy dismembers a freshly hunted kangaroo, the scene is cross-cut with associational vignettes of modern Western butchery, edited to the rhythm of a falling blade (*Appendix: compilation XIV*). The butcher's careful handling of an animal heart is juxtaposed with the Black Boy's energetic efforts to sever the kangaroo's front leg, unskinned, with its human-like paw held up to the sky. These contrasts can be seen to tell of the modern Western need for a distancing from the animal to effect edibility. The four broad categories of distancing techniques or devices as identified by Hyam Maccoby, in *The Sacred Executioner*, are highlighted here: detachment, concealment, misrepresentation and shifting the blame (Maccoby, 1982, p. 50). The use of the butcher as middle-man contrives a shifting of the blame of slaughter, while detachment,

concealment and misrepresentation are achieved through the deconstruction of the animal into portions of pure consumption, some recognisable as animal in origin (the heart) and some not (the mince). Comment is made on the waste of this consumerist commoditisation as the butcher pulls unwanted scraps of sinew from a chicken, while the Black Boy pulls sinew from the kangaroo tail to be used later in the construction of a spear.

But perhaps it is the brief image of the butcher handling the animal heart that articulates the central message of the film most succinctly. The heart is anonymous: cleaned of all extraneous flesh and blood, the organ is without context, to be valued solely by its weight. This image presents a metaphorical expression of the condition of the universal animal heart. Removed by the power of modern human ideology from its place at the centre of our symbolic imagination, it rests in human hands oblivious to its true value (*Appendix: excerpt XV*).

Claude Lèvi-Strauss's double opposition between the raw and the cooked, and the fresh and the rotten, is also evident in *Walkabout*'s overriding theme of culture versus nature:

The axis that joins the raw and cooked is characteristic of the transition to Culture; that joining the raw and the rotten, of the return to Nature. Thus cooking brings about the cultural transformation of the raw, just as putrefaction brings about a natural transformation. (1987, p. 40)

It is with pointed irony, then, that only the Western characters, the butcher and the girl, are shown handling raw food that is not then seen to be 'transformed' by cooking. At the

end of the film, the girl is depicted as a young woman, stagnating in the marital kitchen. Cigarette in hand, she slices raw liver as she falls into a reverie on her adolescent journey (*Appendix: excerpt XVI*).

The first spoken words of the film clearly introduce the theme of the *uncivilised* culture. The voice emanates from a radio in the family kitchen (the same kitchen as depicted at the end of the film) as the mother prepares fruit, perhaps for the forthcoming picnic. While Roeg uses diegetic and non-diegetic sonic montages of distorted sound, often as counterpointing commentary throughout the film, here the words, articulated in a cheerfully amused tone, can be clearly understood:

ANNOUNCER:

The orlotan is the name given to a European singing bird. It is extremely rare. When fattened for eating they are left in dark cardboard boxes and packets of grain are pressed to a hole in the box through which a light is shone. The bird pecks desperately at the grain in the hope of penetrating through to the light which he mistakes for the sun. [ANNOUNCER LAUGHS] This goes on for several weeks. When it has eaten itself so full that it cannot stand or see, it is drowned in cognac. Gourmets regard it as an exceptional delicacy.

The implied cruelty of this food fetishism is clear. Roeg returns to this theme by foregrounding the absurdities of etiquette in the scenes before the father's suicide. Again radio commentary is used for the ironic foreshadowing of the children's impending lack of food and the necessary reassessment of their cultural attitudes towards it:

ANNOUNCER:

... so you have to learn to tell a fish knife from a
meat knife, and a fish fork from a meat fork ...

A significant proportion of the sparse staccato dialogue in the lead-up to the suicide revolves around etiquette and food, pointing to an abstractedness in plenty, and ritual as detachment:

FATHER:

Please don't speak with your mouth full, son.

...

We'll eat now.

GIRL:

Chicken or ham?

WHITE BOY:

Both!

The sequence in which the Black Boy cooks the animals from his hunt most fully exemplifies the link between animal practices, racialisation and cultural imperialism. As the Black Boy stokes his camp-fire and appraises his newly modified spear, the Girl, sitting slightly away from the others, appears intent on regaining her superior cultural composure by plaiting her hair and telling the White Boy to put his shirt on. Underlining the imperialistic point, the White Boy plays with tin soldiers. Despite the fact that the Black Boy has already examined one of the soldiers and tossed it aside as uninteresting,

the Girl urges the White Boy to give him one with unconscious condescension: 'I expect he'd like to play - he's never had any toys of his own'.

The Black Boy then places a whole hare carcass, unskinned, on the fire. A fleeting look of disgust passes over the Girl's face before she turns away. The White Boy's reaction is less extreme, but he also turns away. The Girl looks to the fire again, and we see a momentary insert of a flashback to her father's burning car. The sequence is an important one, for it is here that the children are both depicted as undergoing an unspoken realisation that, in order to survive, they must relinquish their own cultural values and embrace those of the Aboriginal world. The following close-up of the hare, its limbs pointing skywards, not only echoes the form of a burning human body, but also foreshadows the atmosphere of relaxation and sexually-charged play to come as the legs of the cooking carcass slowly move apart with a smooth, deliberate pace suggestive of eroticism. While the children are not shown eating the hare, it is clear that they have accepted the cultural symbolism of the meat, presented so, in its entirety. The animal takes on a greater meaning than merely that of food to be consumed. It is a sacrifice. Once again the animal is seen to be re-invested with the power of ritual and the symbolic. The mood then changes suddenly: the White Boy cries 'Give me a piggy-back!' and all three play in a tree (*Appendix: excerpt XVII*).

The image of the gutted, unskinned hare carcass can also be seen as a metaphoric representation of another theme to be found within *Walkabout*: that of the visual expression of the body, both human and animal, as an inviolable vessel that holds cultural

‘truths’. Elaine Scarry, in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, argues that the image of the opened body is one of uncompromising reality: ‘It is as though the human mind, confronted by the open body itself (whether human or animal) does not have the option of failing to perceive its reality’ (p.126). Thus, the image of the cooking hare cannot be abstracted to either anonymous portions of the consumable nor distanced to a symbolic, traditionally complete, representation of the animal. In *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes’ analysis of the images presented with the recipes featured in the French women’s magazine *Elle*, describes ‘a cookery which is based on coatings and alibis, and is for ever trying to extenuate and even to disguise the primary nature of foodstuffs, the brutality of meat or the abruptness of sea-food’ (1972, p.78). For Barthes, the smooth coatings and disguises are not merely examples of a culinary tradition arising from a cultural definition of consumability, but symptomatic of representations of nationhood as secure and clearly defined. The body itself is seen to represent nationhood, and as such must be clearly defined, separate and thus inviolable. The coating effects not only separateness, but also smoothness, allowing no leaks or gaps that could undermine the integrity of the body.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas, in *Nature Symbols*, observes that ‘the human body is always treated as an image of society’ (1973, p. 98). The Girl’s concern or lack of concern for the condition of her own and her brother’s school-uniform as the film progresses mirrors the passage of their cultural journey. Until the barbequing of the hare, the Girl’s preoccupation with the cleanliness and preservation of their clothes is detailed almost to the point of fetishism, indicating her mistaken belief that only by preserving

their white, Western integrity, as represented by their uniforms, against any intrusion from the nature that surrounds them, will they find salvation. Towards the end of the film, when they come to the abandoned homestead, she returns to this impulse. It is only during the brief, idyllic part of the journey between these two points, and in retrospective reverie, that the Girl's body is presented as less than securely wrapped in the symbolic armour of her culture.

As previously discussed, the representation of the Black Boy, especially at the first encounter with the white children, offers an opposing image. In addition to a reading which recognises the ambivalence of the human/animal in the image, analysis of the outline of the figure itself offers meaning. Here, any notion of a smooth, impenetrable form is defiled. The belt of gaping-mouthed, swinging, lizards is jagged; the buzzing flies break the form further into a blur of inconstancy. In accordance with Baker's observations, the 'detailed individuation' of such jagged outlines:

not only gives [the image] a greater three-dimensional 'reality', but also presents an outline which is far from smooth, perfect, safe and 'human' in its associations ... The same details can also be read, however, as signalling both its otherness and its vulnerability. The breaking up of the outline can also suggest the breaking, opening and wounding of its body. (1993, p. 40)

Observations in line with those made by Scarry, Douglas and Baker, are conceptualised by Mikhail Bakhtin, in *Rabelais and His World*. Bakhtin argues that the philosophy of the 'closed sphere', in which the body is 'finished' and 'isolated' is that of the dominant or

‘official’ ideology (1968, p. 29). In seeking to limit and confine, thereby denying incompleteness and ambiguity, the possibilities of change or ‘otherness’ are denied; and indeed the very possibility of truly ‘belonging’. Images of the unfinalisable or uncontainable reside in the unofficial or marginal viewpoint, wherein the connection between the physical body and the surrounding physical world is made as the boundaries between the two are erased. Grotesque imagery – and the first representation of the Aboriginal boy could be described as such – depicts the body through its connection to the physical world. Figures of incongruity achieve a profound sense of reality and concreteness in their ‘fullness’ (Bakhtin, 1968, p. 436), in the detail and precision, of their expression. This theme is underscored by Roeg’s representations of animals in *Walkabout*, many of which, especially those of reptiles, with frilly collars and spiny backbone ridges, also feature such ragged outlines. The clarity of the cinematography and the use of close-up framing, along with the depiction of the ambiguously bordered in *Walkabout*, all contribute to a cinematic realisation of this theory (*Appendix: compilation XVIII.*).

According to Bakhtin, images of border-defying incongruity or grotesquery most often depict moments of transition and growth (1968, p. 317) and *Walkabout* has been identified by many commentators as a ‘rites of passage’ film in which the Aboriginal ritual also becomes a journey of self-discovery for the Girl and the White Boy. In the film, the external ritual of the Aboriginal experience is contrasted with the modern Western mode of major transitions wherein formal ritual plays little or no part. In *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Anthony Giddens describes these transitions as ‘open

experience thresholds', within which 'each phase of transition tends to become an identity crisis' (1991, p. 148). Roeg's use of avant-garde editing techniques such as visual and sound montage, ellipses and non-diegetic inserts, seek to disorient and destabilise the viewer, contriving intervals of open experience within the diegesis of the film.

The species of animal selected by the Black Boy as a food offering for the children is also of significance. The hare is a non-indigenous, feral animal. As the discussion in the subsequent chapters will show, in Australian cinematic representation, images of indigenous and non-indigenous or feral animals are employed metonymically to articulate varying degrees of 'Australianness'. As a non-indigenous animal, the hare is a food from the children's own cultural background, even if they do not recognise it as such presented in that form. The children are English, and therefore legitimately unfamiliar with their surroundings, but their representation and the narrative trajectory of the film also serves allegorically as comment on the history of white settlement and the relationship which white Australians have (the Girl), or could have (the White Boy), with the landscape.

As they set out with the Black Boy after their meeting at the oasis, the first animals the children see are camels. Nowra posits that their excitement is due to their astonishment in finding animals that they never imagined existed in Australia (Nowra, 2003, p. 39). However, the White Boy's imagining or hallucination of a group of explorers riding the camels points to a more nuanced interpretation. Again, non-indigenous and feral in Australia, the camel is a culturally familiar animal to the children and it expresses the weight of its historical significance visually in the White Boy's perception. Previous to

the camel sequence, the only animals the children have noticed are the budgerigars in the quandong tree; a purely pragmatic interest that signals the development of the bush skills they will need if they are to survive, and an interest which the Girl abandons as soon as they meet the Black Boy.

The lyrics of a non-diegetic choral arrangement in the film also place emphasise on the children's English background by working in counterpoint to the Australian settings that it accompanies. The song is introduced as the children set off into the unknown of the desert after their father's suicide. The lyrics are those of the traditional English poem and song, *Who Killed Cock Robin?*, referring to the death of Robin Hood:

*Who killed Cock Robin?
I said the sparrow, with my bow and arrow.
I killed Cock Robin.*

*All the birds of the air fell a-sighing and a-sobbing.
When they heard of the death of poor Cock Robin.
When they heard of the death of poor Cock Robin.*

*Who saw him die?
I said the fly, with my little eye.
I saw him die.*

On one level, the darkness of the lyrics recall the death of the father, and the robin and the sparrow, being indigenous to the British Isles, foreground the incongruity of the two English children lost in the Australian outback. The lyrics also accord with the film's overriding animal focus. The fly with his 'little eye' foreshadows the ever-present observing animals along the children's journey, while the sparrow's role hints ominously at the potential dangers posed by the animal life the children may soon encounter. In light

of the discussion of the animal representations above, it is interesting to note that this single suggestion of animal menace in the film is articulated through a non-Australian text.

At the end of the film, a voice-over narration of A. E. Houseman's poem XL, from *A Shropshire Lad* (1896) accompanies a montage of the Girl's idealised recollections of her outback experience:

*Into my heart an air that kills
From yon far country blows:
What are those blue remembered hills,
What spires, what farms are those?*

*That is the land of lost content
I see it shining plain
The happy highways where I went
And cannot come again.*

The English pastoral landscape evoked in the poem is clearly at odds with the images presented on the screen, yet the tone and the sentiments conveyed resonate with the immediate characterisation of the Girl and one of the many themes implicit in the film. Thus, the poem can be interpreted both as an expression of the grown Girl's sense of loss and, like *Who Killed Cock Robin?*, as a universal elegy for the loss of the Western human connection with the natural environment, and the impending loss of the animals within it (*Appendix: excerpt XIX*).

Walkabout can be regarded as a rite of passage film within the very history of Australian national cinema itself. Before *Walkabout*, the animal image was most usually marshalled

to confer meaning upon a transposed colonial dichotomy in which the animal stood for either a nostalgic notion of pastoral colonial innocence or a challenging subject to be overcome in man's quest to tame the new country. It is in its representations of the animals which inhabit the landscape that the film marks a turning point in the articulation of resonant explorations of Australian identity. Post-*Walkabout*, representations of animals, and the representations of the relationship between humans and animals, in a significant proportion of Australian films, propose a more complex mimesis.

In re-investing the animal image with the power of objectivity; in returning the animal to the heart of our symbolic imagination; Roeg creates a richer symbolic representation of the human image of society. The style and form of the film itself, resisting the smooth containment of conventional narratives with shards of ambiguity, results in a perpetually unsettling energy that reaches beyond the text to redefine the limits – or rather, suggest the limitlessness – of the power of animal symbolism in film.

Chapter 2

Representations of the colonial and postcolonial: Animals in the landscapes of emerging nationhood

The representation of landscape and nature, ‘what is sayable and “see-able”’ (Carter, 1998, p. 89), in literature, painting and cinema, has been at the core of the Australian identity dialectic since white settlement. While white Australia’s beginnings as a penal colony have been identified as philosophically problematic to the European colonial mind in terms of both representation and identity, at least equal, if not greater, weight has been given to the role of landscape in this discourse (Morris, 1998; Turner, 1986; White, 1981), as outlined in the introduction. White Australia’s sense of place and time has been regarded as distinct, for not only did it reside within the aesthesia of another continent - as with other nations of colonial past - but its spatial and temporal terms of reference were most often antithetical to the ‘realities’ of the new country. The temporal and spatial relationships of the theoretically presumed order were necessarily contorted in an effort to construct meanings from ‘the new land of contrarities’, a physically unfamiliar, strange land ‘full of natural oddities that did not fit into the accepted order of things, a topsy-turvy world where nature seemed at odds with herself’ (White, 1981, pp. 1-15).

The metaphysical problem confronting the new settlers was to find new ways of perceiving. The aesthesia of the Old World framed the New World as ‘wilderness’;

unknown and potentially unknowable in its vastness. For land to become landscape, a cultural construct that can be given voice in artistic discourse, it must be subjected to human design. Whilst that may not, in totality, be physically possible through agriculture and architecture, as in the case of Australia, it can be achieved psychologically. Once wilderness is represented within stories, images and sounds, it is no longer mere geography. It becomes transformed through culture into landscape:

it has been translated and utilized as an element of myth ...
the landscape image might *signify* nature, but that is not to
say it *is* nature. The very notion of nature is a cultural
construct. (Gibson, 1992, p. 74. Original emphasis)

The presence of the Australian landscape in the majority of films produced throughout the history of Australian filmmaking (Gibson in McFarlane, Mayer & Bertrand, 1999, p. 254), therefore, attests to a greater significance than that of a convenient and decorative *mise-en-scène* for local narratives. In film, as in other visual arts, the Australian landscape acts as an attendant character, leitmotif or sign (Molloy, 1990b; Gibson, 1992; 1998). This chapter aims to illustrate how attention to the images of fauna within these landscapes uncovers equally important representations, adding illuminating inflections to the environment's role in the continuing expression of Australia's spatial and temporal terms of reference, and to the cultural ideology expressed by the whole.

Traditionally, emphasis has been placed on the early accounts of the Australian landscape to highlight reported images of 'the Grotesque, the Weird': the fresh eyes of the Europeans may have been horrified or intrigued, but they were open to the new world

around them. Marcus Clarke's 1873 preface to Adam Lindsay Gordon's posthumously published volume of poems is a source of such much quoted phrases:

In Australia alone is to be found the Grotesque, the Weird, the strange scribblings of nature learning how to write. Some see no beauty in our trees without shade, our flowers without perfume, our birds who cannot fly, and our beast who have not yet learnt to walk on all fours. But the dweller in the wilderness acknowledges the subtle charm of this fantastic land of monstrosities.

However, the key to the representation of landscape, and subsequently of animals, in Australian art, including cinema, lies in the lines that follow the above:

He becomes familiar with the beauty of loneliness. Whispered to by the myriad tongues of the wilderness, he learns the language of the barren and the uncouth, and can read the hieroglyphs of haggard gum tress, blown into odd shapes, distorted with fierce hot winds, or cramped with cold nights, when the Southern Cross freezes in a cloudless sky of ice blue.

'The myriad tongues of the wilderness' and 'the language of the barren' articulate the frustration of being unable to perceive fully despite all effort; of being, if not illiterate, then far from fluent in the 'language' of the new land and unable, as yet, to translate the environment into landscape. Georgiana Molloy, writing from the Swan River colony, Perth, in the 1830s, is more direct in her expression:

This is certainly a beautiful place – but were it not for domestic charms the eye of the emigrant would soon weary of the unbounded limits of thickly clothed dark green forest *where nothing can be described to feast the imagination ...* (Cited in Lines, 1991, p. 62. Emphasis added)

Ross Gibson, in *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, identifies these problematics of perception ‘where nothing can be described’ as ‘a sublime structuring void organising all Australian culture’ (Gibson, 1992, p. 65). Meaghan Morris examines the role of the sublime in Australian culture, specifically in film, in greater depth in her article *White Panic or, Mad Max and the Sublime* (1998), in which she deconstructs cinematic representations in relation to the historiography of allegorical thought concerning national narratives (Morris, 1998). Many of Morris’s observations and arguments backgrounding her study are pertinent to the analysis of Australian cultural representations of animals.

The concept of the sublime, and providing a neat definition for such a concept, is in itself problematic. At a philosophical level, post-Kantian readings identifying the sublime as a relational factor in the subject/object dialectics that inform values of incommensurability (de Bolla, 1989; Ferguson, 1992; Hertz, 1985) certainly apply to the historiography of Australian art discourse. However, in line with Morris and in order to ground this discussion as much as possible within the realms of the concrete rather than the abstract, I will adhere to the concept of the sublime as understood more informally in the vernacular: inspiring awe to an incommunicable degree; ‘awesome’ in modern terminology. The ‘inferior effects’ (Burke cited in Morris, 1998, p. 5) of the sublime, in

which the 'impression' results from feelings of surprise, shock or incredulity, will also be taken as included in the meaning of the term.

As Morris notes, 'the language of the sublime' (Otto cited in Morris, 1998, p. 242), was adopted by early white Australian settlers in their efforts to describe their new experiences:

The 'language of the sublime' was invoked 'well into the twentieth century ... by travellers, explorers and writers as a discourse appropriate for an encounter with an alien land or people' (Otto, 1993: 548), and the 'language' was primarily Edmund Burke's. Britain's invasion of Australia began in 1788, and *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (first published in 1757 and 1759) was widely read by the early colonists, serving as 'a basic handbook – even in the field' (Dixon, 1986: 48) for ordering their responses to 'scenery'. However, it is often a *failure* of that language, a mismatch between handbook and field, model and experience, that precipitates in settler texts the 'plot' of the sublime; from the botching of a first, formal exercise in 'European vision' (Smith: 1960) follows a struggle to reconstitute a way of seeing and reappropriate descriptive power (Carter, 1987; Gibson, 1992). (Morris, 1998, p.243. Original emphasis)

Using this language, in *On the Wool Track* (first published in 1910), C.E.W Bean describes 'the country where men have died' purely in negative terms; his way of 'seeing' is focussed by the obverse:

There were no Alpine precipices, no avalanches or volcanoes or black jungles full of wild beasts, no earthquakes ... Nothing appalling or horrible rushed upon these men. Only there happened – nothing. There might

have been a pool of cool water behind any one of those tree clumps; only – there was not. It might have rained at any time; only – it did not. There might have been a fence or a house just over the next rise; only – there was not. They lay down, with the birds hopping from branch to branch above them and the bright sky peeping down at them. No one came. Nothing happened. That was all. (Bean, 1945, p. 2)

Early representations of the landscape, and the animals within that landscape, are framed not so much by a simple failure to see beauty in the unfamiliar, as by a failure see at all. This viewpoint continued to inflect the representation of animals in Australian cinema until the 1970s and beyond.

The poems of Henry Lawson and ‘Banjo’ Patterson are also seminal to the historiography of Australian representation. Writing in the final decade of the nineteenth century they were the voices of the two different traditions in Australian literature shaping the emerging national identity, traditions which are still evident in the ‘bush/city dichotomy’ found in Australian cinema to this day. For Paterson, coming from the romantic tradition, the ‘authentic’ Australian experience and identity was to be found in the ‘bush’ not in the ‘squalid’ cities. Lawson also wrote about the ‘bush’ but from a pioneering perspective which saw mainly hardship in rural life (Mulligan & Hill, 2001, p.75). Their contrasting viewpoints were expressed in a poetic exchange through the pages of the *Bulletin* magazine in 1892, and a sample of this exchange gives insight into their differing perceptions. Paterson’s reply to Lawson’s ‘Borderland’ opens:

So you're back from up the country,
Mister Lawson, where you went
And you're cursing all the business in a bitter discontent

And concludes:

Did you hear the silver chiming of the bell-birds on the range?
But, perchance, the wild birds' music by your senses was despised
.....
You had better stick to Sydney and make merry with the 'push',
For the bush will never suit you, and you'll never suit the bush.

Lawson replies:

Did you ever guard the cattle when the night was inky black
And it rained, and icy water trickled gently down your back
Till your saddle-weary backbone started aching at the roots
And you almost heard the croaking of the bullfrog in your boots?
Did you shiver in the saddle, curse the restless stock and cough
Till a squatter's blanky dummy cantered up to warn you off?
(Cited in Semmler, 1974, pp. 81-82)

These contrasting viewpoints echo through the representations in the films discussed in this chapter and the next, most clearly in the use of characterisation to denote suitability for life in the bush or 'fittedness to the land' (Carter, 1996, p. 89).

Paterson has been described as a writer 'in the romantic tradition' (Semmler, 1974; Roderick, 1993; Mulligan & Hill, 2001). Elements of a general romantic aesthetic can be found in many Australian films with themes based upon the challenges of landscape as representations of national identity. This aesthetic is particularly pertinent in the consideration of films which address the issues of emerging nationhood, for example, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). Arising from philosophical and artistic opposition to

aristocratic rigidity and industrialisation, the Romantic movement was explicitly concerned with the alienating experience of existence in a society perceived to be in decay. Thus images of nature and escapism were engendered as antidote to the failings of reality: ‘At the intersection of Nature and Industry stands *Art*’ (Eisenstein cited in Gibson, 1992, p. 71. Emphasis added).

The romantic aesthetic, or picturesque genre, guided the early pictorial representations of the Australian landscape. This genre was dominant in European painting throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and its representations of mild landscapes given perspective by trees or natural features rather than people are understood to ‘represent a longing for a disappeared ideal of pre-enclosure rural life’ (Taylor cited in Mulligan & Hill, 2001, p. 40). Ken Taylor ascribes the use of this style in Australia as a failure of visual language:

The representations of the picturesque were part of the imaginative occupation of the landscape prior to the physical occupation ... It was the manifest destiny of European settlers to turn awaiting nature into an Eden of pastoral Arcadia. So people saw what they wanted to see. Representation of an Arcadian ideal resulted from *a state of mind where memory and allusion played primary roles*’.
(Cited in Mulligan & Hill, 2001, p. 44. Emphasis added)

Ultimately, it was another European art-movement which was to provide Australian artists with a more effective language. The ‘Heidelberg School’ evolved from Impressionism and the techniques of the school brought back to Australia by artist Tom Roberts. Artists worked *en plein air*; from their perceptions and experiences within the bush rather than as observers from a distance to it (Mulligan & Hill, 2001, p. 36).

Impressionist techniques are about abstraction; concerned with fleeting moods and nuances of light and shade. These techniques necessitate engagement with the environment, of course, but the representations remain as ‘impressions’; eschewing the long lingering look of detail, or sustained contemplation, and as such remain within the category of the sublime ‘where nothing can be described’. The influence of these representations can be seen in post-Revival Australian cinema from the mid-seventies onwards.

As Gibson posits, the development of Australian cinema alongside the newly federated nation, in the early 1900s, fostered the articulation of the ideology of Australian nationhood and identity as the predominant theme, overt or covert, in Australian films (Gibson in McFarlane & Mayer, 1999, p. 254). In a ‘climate of heady *anti*-imperialism, sexual liberations and cultural revolution’ (Morris, 1998, p. 245. Original emphasis), and encouraged by the funding stipulations of the Australian Film Commission which favoured films perceived to have cultural merit over box-office potential, these concerns resurfaced with renewed vigour in the films of the Revival during the mid-1970s and early 1980s (Bertrand in McFarlane & Mayer, 1999; Dermody & Jacka; 1988, Gibson, 1992).

Within the Australian cinematic tradition, the portrayal of the landscape has been, for the most part, as a perverse and challenging ordeal to be transcended through human endeavour and national spirit (Molloy, 1990a; Morris, 1998; Turner, 1986; White, 1981), thereby providing a canvas upon which to draw articulations of nationhood and identity. The films discussed in this chapter; *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975), *The Chant of Jimmie*

Blacksmith (1978), *My Brilliant Career* (1979), *We of the Never Never* (1982), *The Goddess of 1967* (2001) and *Japanese Story* (2003), all concern themselves with themes of emerging nationhood and the portrayal of landscape. These texts, with the exception of *Japanese Story*, provide rich examples of images of animals which can be interpreted as signs encoding representations of both colonial and post-colonial or post-federation sensibilities. While the images themselves are necessarily post-federation invocations of the animal in colonial tradition and mythology, post-colonial analysis of the representations reveals additional elements previously overlooked.

David Malouf has observed that ‘our uniqueness may lie ... in the *tension* between environment and culture’ (Boyer Lecture, 1998. Emphasis added). Gibson has also noted the importance of this nexus:

During the 1970s and early 1980s filmmakers ... were attempting to create a cohesive view of national character through the rendition of Australian landscape as if it were the one thing that all factions of the society held in common. Paradoxically, however, the same films were also, in effect, promoting the view that the land was definitively sublime and suprasocial, that a society cannot make much of an impression on such a habitat. (1992, p. 68)

Both commentators identify the Nature/Culture dichotomy as an element essential to the understanding of Australian representations. In line with the arguments set out in chapter 1, by analysing the representation of animals as cultural constructs, the following analyses will explore Hirschman and Sanders’ thesis that it is in the dynamics of the

human-animal relationship that the Nature/Culture dichotomy is most clearly drawn (Hirschman & Sanders, 1997, pp. 53-79).

For the sake of clarity, in the following discussion post-colonial Australia will be referred to as 'post-federation' Australia in order to mark a distinction between the historical period and the form of cultural criticism. As previously outlined in the introduction, for the purposes of this thesis, post-colonial textual analysis is understood as a process which reflects upon, de-constructs and then re-constructs images inherited primarily from the colonial past, but also the pre-colonial past, as in the analysis of *Walkabout* (1971) in chapter 1. This approach promises to foreground elements of difference by emphasising the specific and the local, thereby enabling the recognition of signs and encodings of representation and identity previously obscured. The first four films selected for consideration all feature narratives portraying Australian experiences around the time of federation, and this chapter will also show how these texts themselves can each be viewed as discrete examples of post-colonial discourse.

While the preceding analysis of *Walkabout* focused on the meanings to be gained from Roeg's objective cinematography and the re-investment of the pre-colonial symbolic imagination in the animal image, there is a sequence in the film that exhibits a romantic colonial aesthetic. The sequence provides a succinct example of the mode of representation of animals, and the cultural meanings invested in them, prevalent in Australian film before *Walkabout*. It is placed in 'the third act', when sexual tensions have been revealed and seemingly resolved. The troupe are journeying companionably

together through varied landscapes and cultural differences appear to have been bridged. Following a scene in which the Aboriginal soothes the boy's sunburn with the blood of animal entrails, there is a cut to a picturesque montage of bush fauna – a long-tailed possum, a yellow-crested cockatoo – both framed within the traditional aesthetics of picture-postcard representation. The composition of the images adhere to the schema of classical proportion and design, recalling paintings and photographs in the strongly subjective and decorative style which dominated such representations in film until the mid-60s and early 70s, when the 'new repertoire of landscape/nature representations' emerged (Carter, 1998, p. 89) as evidenced in the greater part of *Walkabout*. The montage works as a reference to earlier representations when Australian animals were presented as 'oddities, exotica, antipodea' (Carter, 1998, p. 90). Carter's research on the representation of Australian nature and landscape in documentaries and newsreels at the National Film and Sound Archives concludes that these records were:

massively dominated by popular furry animals – kangaroos, wallabies, wombats, koalas, platypus – plus emus and kookaburras of course. Wedge-tailed eagles, bower birds and fairy penguins made a few appearances too. (1999. p.90)

For Carter, these representations:

were the familiar exotica that reassured the nation of its distinctiveness; but it was a weak distinctiveness, in effect held under the reassuring colonial gaze that rendered both observer and observed antipodean. (1999. p. 90)

The 'weak distinctiveness' described by Carter is exemplified by the contrasting effect and power of the differing cinematic styles employed by Roeg to represent the animal images in *Walkabout*. The animals in the montage described above are rendered passive within the constraints of the traditional framing and deployment of the *mise-en-scène*. They may be wild, but they are captive to their role in a pre-conceived, taken-for-granted imaginary; functioning merely as desultory decorations in the preamble to the action which follows. In this alternate representational mode, the animals are divested of the existential vivacity and power previously established.

Following the montage, the group meander through lush terrain amid tall palm trees. The environment evokes a grand garden from former times: a reconstructed Eden degenerating gently back to a pre-colonial state. The visual language is that of the picturesque, giving form to 'a state of mind where memory and allusion played primary roles' (Taylor cited Mulligan & Hill, 2001, p. 44). The use of palm trees within the *mise-en-scène* is worth note as further reference to early Eurocentric representations. After visiting Australia in 1827, the artist Augustus Earle had success in Europe with his paintings of the Australian landscape. At a time when uncultivated areas of 'wilderness' accorded with biblical references connoting ostracism, evil and barrenness beyond danger, 'the sight of old growth trees in wet sclerophyll forest filled him with awe but a large stretch of open forest filled him with horror' (Mulligan & Hill, 2001, p. 45). He remedied the situation by choosing to paint 'lush' scenery 'featuring plants like the cabbage-tree palm that might have seemed more familiar to the European eye' (Mulligan & Hill, 2001, p. 46).

The image of the Girl herself is also one of deconstructed romantic colonialism: she holds a makeshift parasol of twigs and a tablecloth, while fanning herself with a palm frond fan, as she follows the White Boy and the Black Boy in single file. Non-diegetic inserts of turning pages appear randomly as the White Boy recounts his story, serving to underline the references to ‘recordings’ of history as the *re*-presentations of cultural constructs. In this sequence Roeg has employed the animals as props within the *mise-en-scène* to signify a vignette of Australian colonial romanticism which, by contrast, serves to highlight the differing approach of the rest of the film (*Appendix: excerpt XXI*).

Elements of a general romantic aesthetic can be found in many Australian films with themes based upon the challenges of landscape as representations of national identity. This aesthetic, with its focus on themes of alienation, nature and escapism, is particularly pertinent in the consideration of films which address the issues of emerging nationhood such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Directed by Peter Weir, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) has been hailed as the ‘flagship’ of the Revival (Pike & Cooper, 1998; Dermody & Jacka, 1988; McFarlane & Mayer 1992), and commended for exhibiting an aesthetic credibility previously lacking in the ‘ocker’ comedies of the early ‘70s such as *Stork* (Dir. Tim Burstall, 1971), *The Adventures of Barry McKenzie* (Dir. Bruce Beresford, 1972) and *Alvin Purple* (Dir. Tim Burstall, 1973) (McFarlane & Mayer, 1992, p. 55). The film has also been identified, less positively, by Dermody and Jacka as setting the tone and mode for the ‘AFC genre’ which dominated Australian film style for several years in which ‘pretty’ period, ‘nostalgia’ or history films unfolded their ‘unshaped narratives’ to the backdrop of ‘cinematography dedicated to the glories of Australian light’ with ‘clear

traces of a romantic, even charm-school, Australian post-impressionism'(1988, pp. 31-33).

Contrary to Dermody and Jacka's claims that the 'approach of the camera is functional rather than expressive' (1988, p 33), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* exhibits cinematographical expression beyond the 'lyrical' within a narrative exploring the metaphysical interspace between the European settlers and the mysteries of the ancient land which surrounds them. Based on a 1967 novel by Joan Lindsay, the story is set on St Valentine's Day 1900, the year before Australian Federation, as a group of teenage schoolgirls are released from the confines of their strict boarding school for a picnic beneath the eponymous rock, from which some of them are never to return. Far from being a generic mystery or horror thriller, the plot defies the narrative conventions of classical Hollywood cinema by consistently refusing to supply sufficient information to support a singular hypothesis on the fate of the girls (McFarlane & Mayer, 1992, p. 5). Freed from the dictates of these conventions, the text effects an experiential canvass upon which Russell Boyd's cinematography and Gheorghe Zamfir's ethereal pan-pipe music take hold of the imagination without leading it in any one particular direction.

Contrary to dominant interpretations of the themes to be found in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* that point to an understanding of the film as an expression of white alienation and the fragility European culture, the disappearance of the girls (in particular, Miranda), Miss McGraw and the death of Mrs Appleyard, can be read more subtly as a portrayal of the sensibilities necessary for the *acceptance* of white settlers to, and into, the land. All these

characters have learnt to 'see' the country in various ways and to varying degrees, and the acceptance of the girls into the rock, and their sacrifice upon it, serves as an analogy for federation and an expression of the ideological temperament necessary to effect a successful transition into a truly *Australian* nationhood. The poetic leitmotif of the film, spoken both diegetically and non-diegetically by Miranda: '*All that we see or seem, is but a dream within a dream*' - two lines from Edgar Allen Poe's *A Dream Within a Dream* (1849) - also lends itself to an interpretation beyond leave-taking or a premonition of death. It is important to note here that the two lines come from the first, more optimistic stanza of the poem, and interpreted in this light can be understood, within the context of the film, as commenting upon the impossibility of sustaining the illusion or 'dream' of a European aesthetic within the realities of the new continent:

*Take this kiss upon the brow!
And, in parting from you now,
This much let me avow-
You are not wrong, who deem
That my days have been a dream;
Yet if hope has flown away
In a night, or in a day,
In a vision, or in none,
Is it therefore the less gone?
All that we see or seem
Is but a dream within a dream.*

Consequently, Miranda can be regarded as the figurehead for a movement away from the abstraction of the sublime, representing the qualities of a new perception grounded in the realities of her environment.

The film opens with an establishing shot of the monolithic Appleyard College stranded

on an island of cultivated green amidst the foregrounded 'sea' of the brown-toned bush. Miranda's connection with nature, albeit pastoral, is established in the first dialogued scene. As she goes about her toilette with room-mate Sara, Miranda sings as she brushes her hair:

*...black horse, white horse, brown horse, grey,
Trotting down the paddock on a bright sunny day.*

Miranda then invites Sara to come and visit her at the family station in Queensland. On the journey to the picnic, it is Miranda who jumps down from the drag to open the gate, foreshadowing her confidence in entering the countryside. It is during this sequence that the haunting, premonitory pan-pipes are introduced, accompanying a montage of birds startled into flocking flight. Here, Weir intercuts freeze-frames with action, eliciting meaning beyond the whole of the *mise-en-scène* by introducing the theme of time, or more specifically, timelessness, and pointing to Miranda's active engagement with her environment and refusal to be bound by the past. The style of this scene is reminiscent of Roeg's use of editing and montage in the buffalo-shooting sequence in *Walkabout* (*Appendix: compilation XXIII*). As will be shown below, Weir employs representations of the animal image in configurations similar to those found in *Walkabout* at many points in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*.

On the picnic, it is Miranda who is seen actively inspecting the native flora with her magnifying glass, while those around her linger languidly, reading or eating, eyes cast downwards; the only movement the occasional raising of hands as flies are waved away.

Miranda's refusal to be bound by time is illustrated in the scene where the picnic party find their watches have stopped. When asked about the whereabouts of her diamond watch, Miranda replies that she no longer wears it for she 'can't stand the ticking above [her] heart'. It is Miranda who initiates the exploration of the rock, her physical confidence evident in her purposeful stride across the stream. Once on the rock, the image of Miranda's face is superimposed upon the rock, foreshadowing not so much her disappearance into it, as her merging *with* it. Again, it is Miranda who first succumbs to the 'seduction' of the rock by removing her shoes and stockings (*Appendix: compilation XXIV*).

The three other girls who climb the rock - Irma, Marion and Edith - are characters representing differing levels of acceptance or recognition of the landscape, and they are 'received' or 'rejected' by the rock accordingly. Marion, who remains missing on the rock with Miranda, exhibits a cool, logical detachment as she muses on the humanity represented by the group of picnickers below her:

Whatever can those people be doing down there? A
surprising number of human beings are without
purpose, although it is probable they are performing
some function unknown to themselves.

Marion's observation is seemingly both acknowledged and sanctioned by Miranda as she articulates her leitmotif: 'Everything begins and ends at exactly the right time and place'. Marion's comment carries added meaning, for it comes after a remark of Edith's in which she too has looked down, but interpreted the scene differently: 'Except for those people down there, we might be the only living creatures in the whole world'.

Edith's remark is immediately contradicted visually by an inserted sequence of close-ups of ants; first on grass, then on crumbs and finally, on the Valentine cake and icing. Like Roeg in *Walkabout*, Weir employs the cinematographic style of the new 'ecological perspective' here, focussing on 'small-scale animals such as ants, insects and lizards' (Carter, 1999, p.6) to delineate the relationship between the animate and inanimate, the environment and the creatures, including humans, within it. The progression of the ant sequence also suggests the movement of nature towards a reclamation of human culture; the inexorable and ever-present transforming force of nature at work - again in a manner reminiscent of *Walkabout*. Marion is thus shown to understand a truth about her environment that Edith fails to comprehend. Marion is accepted into the rock, while Edith is rejected (*Appendix: excerpt XXV*).

Edith's refusal to engage with the natural environment is represented by her determination not to get her feet wet, and later her shock at her friends' removal of their shoes and stockings. However, it is Edith's inability to perceive her environment - to 'see' - that is emphasised. When she is returned to the rock with Mademoiselle de Portiers and Constable Jones in order to reconstruct the events leading up to her friends' disappearance she is confused by her surroundings. 'I don't know,' she says, 'It all looks the same,' while Mademoiselle de Portiers exhorts, 'Look around you darling, maybe you can see it now.' When she does perceive the natural environment, she can see no good in it. For Marion, the rock is 'ugly' and 'old', and her declaration, 'I never thought it would be so nasty or I wouldn't have come', seems weighted with the echoes of myriad such cries from generations of settlers before her.

Irma is the only girl to be rescued from the rock after several days. Commentators such as Hunter, in 'Corsetway to Heaven' (1985, pp. 190-3) and Dermody and Jacka, in *The Screening of Australia, Volume 2* (1988, pp. 107-9), identify sexuality as the key to the machinations of the plot of *Picnic*. In such a scheme:

Blonde hair is the absolute sign of purity; Miranda's fairness 'explains' why she should be so perfectly attuned to her transcendent destiny, while Irma's darkness accounts for her eventual rejection and re-entry to the world forever changed, forever silent about her experience. When she goes – dressed in the red of sexual experience – into the physical culture class to farewell her old classmates, general hysteria breaks out' (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 108)

However, if the character of Irma and her role in the film is analysed through her ability to perceive her surroundings, new interpretations are thrown into play. Irma is certainly presented as knowing: her comments and observations are coquettish, hinting at a sexual maturity beyond that of her girlfriends. In the exchange when Miranda reveals that she no longer wears her watch, Irma, looking around and well aware of the male presence of Ben Hussey the stable proprietor, retorts: 'If it were mine, I'd wear it always - even in the bath.' Irma is alive to her surroundings and is seen to respond positively to nature. In the carriage, on the way to the picnic, she responds to Miss McGraw's extemporaneous geology lesson about the rock with: 'Waiting a million years, just for us'. On the rock she dreamily intones: 'If only we could stay out here all night and watch the moon rise'. It is in her musings on Sarah, however, that Irma's rather cold and pragmatic view of nature is revealed:

Sarah reminds me of a little deer papa brought home
once. I looked after it, but it died. Mama always
said it was doomed.

Irma is seen to appropriate nature in a purely romantic fashion to suit the needs of her own expression. She is rejected from the rock not so much because of her 'darkness' but because her perception is ultimately false, never going beyond the realm of the self-serving.

Miss McGraw, the mathematics teacher, is also lured into the rock. It could be argued that she too is 'called' because of her virginal state, but Miss McGraw is another character who, in her own way, perceives her surroundings. While she does not embrace every aspect of the experience as positive,

This we do for pleasure. And we will shortly be at the
mercy of venomous snakes and poisonous ants. How
foolish can human creatures be?

her cynicism is not total. She is not only knowledgeable, but enthusiastic and even excited as she describes the formation of the rock to the girls in the carriage. On the picnic she reads her geology book. Similarly, Mrs Appleyard, whom we are led to infer ultimately commits suicide upon the rock, is portrayed as having some connection to nature. Her warning to the girls as they set out on their adventure, later echoed by Miss McGraw:

The rock itself is extremely dangerous ... the vicinity
is renown for its venomous snakes and poisonous ants
of various species

exhibits a certain respect for her environment in the detail of 'various species'. Despite being confined to the dark, interior *mise-en-scène* of fusty Victoriana, it is as Mrs Appleyard looks outward onto the school grounds that she intuits the danger that her wards may be in as she perceives the schoolgirls symbolised in a gaggle of white turkeys (*Appendix: excerpt XXV.*). Whether by suicide or not, Mrs Appleyard's death is certain, however, announced by the end titles. While her perception of the environment connects her to the rock, her death is inevitable in the context of the logic of the ideology expressed in the film. Mrs Appleyard embodies the preservation of time in memory, looking back towards the 'lost home' of England. She is dressed in mourning black for Queen Victoria, and her office displays the images and decorations of colonialism and empire, exemplified by the print of a tiger recalling the British experience in India. Her nostalgia is given direct voice in one of the final scenes of the film as she recounts memories of her holidays in 'dear old Bournemouth' while she dines with Mademoiselle de Portiers.

The introduction of the character of Bertie, Sarah's long lost brother, who ultimately finds Irma after rescuing Michael from the rock, immediately places him as being attuned to nature. In contrast to his picnicking charges - Colonel Fitzhubert, his wife, and nephew Michael - who are seen sitting stiffly on fold-away chairs, seemingly marooned in a bush landscape vibrating with the noise of flies and cicadas, Bertie stands. As a cicada lands on his sleeve he places his hand over it, shakes it to initiate its percussion, and shows it to Michael, his foil, before launching it back into the bush (*Appendix: excerpt XXVII.*).

Traditionally, Weir's use of the image of a white swan to symbolise Miranda has been interpreted as an invocation of European mythology to signify beauty and metamorphosis. In the film, the swan is associated with Venus, and connected to Miranda through the allusion made by Mademoiselle de Portiers as she studies a plate of Boticelli's Venus, and with the Valkyries, who came to earth as swans. Dermody and Jacka observe:

Michael pictures Miranda as a white swan, an image which evokes not only grace and beauty, but purity, sacrifice and coupling between, animal, human and god, as in the myth of Leda and the swan. (1988, p. 108)

The swan image provides another reference to Miranda's conjunction with the environment. It is important to note that it is only through Michael's eyes that Miranda is symbolised as a swan. Michael is unable to perceive Miranda's true nature. His view throughout the film is unswervingly colonial and European, as is that of Mademoiselle Portiers, who is only able to see Miranda as Renaissance art. Michael's comment that,

In England young ladies wouldn't be allowed to walk in the forest. Not alone anyway.

indicates his inability to conceive of a culture other than that of the old country. The image of the white swan remains the only overtly colonial animal representation in the film, its very presence pointing to the absence of the black swan whose environment it has usurped.

In contrast to Michael's romantic imaginings, Bertie is portrayed carrying a bird coup holding three game birds. Themes of class and colonialism run through this sequence. As Bertie is at work, the grateful Irma comes to thank him for rescuing her from the rock. Her enthusiasm is dampened on realising that he is a working boy and therefore beneath any romantic notions she might have had of the outcomes of the encounter. While caged birds can be read as symbolising repressed female sexuality, within the context of this discussion, they can also be seen as representing imported birds for an imported, colonial sport. Unlike the omnipresent swan of Michael's imagination, Bertie holds and controls these symbols of the past, confining them to a small area of merely pragmatic importance. He remains undaunted as Irma turns her attentions to Michael. The suggested analogy places Irma as a creature developed from the sensibilities of another culture purely for the frivolities of the 'sport' of courtship and Bertie as uninterested in it all. The white turkeys on the school lawn are neither obviously indigenous nor obviously imported. Like the schoolgirls they represent, they embody the liminal, symbolising those on the cusp of belonging (*Appendix: compilation XXVIII*).

In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Weir's direction and Russel Boyd's cinematography work to represented the animal image through two differing perspectives, according to the viewpoints or ideology to be conveyed at various points within the film. When the animal image is used to confer meaning through transposed colonial imagery, it is framed as a subjective spectacle, in the picturesque style. The animal is 'captured' in the frame as in an empowered gaze; shot from a distance or from above, its movements controlled and

contained by the focus of the camera lens. The white turkeys on the school lawn, as discussed above, provide one such instance, but the swan image evoked by Michael provides the main example, controlled as it is by his own imagination, appearing not only on the lake but also at the end of his bed. In addition to symbolising Miranda for Michael, the swan image also points to the blinding nostalgia for the colonial which prevents him from perceiving the true nature of his environment, and from making the ideological shift necessary for successfully entering into it, and thereby entering into the future. His ideology prevents him from imagining the girl beyond the image. Just as the image of the swan is never seen to fly away, only disappear, so Michael is bereft of all imaginings except for memories of the past. Miranda's true nature is represented by the freeze-frame montage of flying birds noted earlier: not only are they real products and participants of and in their environment, but in their flight they also symbolize the desire to move forward into the future, despite all attempts to thwart such a progression by the freezing of time.

In contrast, Weir also employs the animal image from an objective viewpoint, emphasising the physical immediacy of the animal, in the sequences on or around the rock. Much of the power of the atmosphere of horror in the film is achieved through cinematography that invests the rock itself with objectivity and the sense of an 'other' in opposition to the niceties of the colonial culture. The rock is framed as towering vertiginously above the girls, with canted angles and slight camera-shake intimating an uncontrollable force. The girls themselves are depicted as the observed, viewed from overhead or from inside the rock itself. While on the rock, the girls lay down to sleep. The sequence includes close-ups of flies on the girls' feet and a skink passing through the

group as they slumber unaware. Here, both the cinematography and the suggested theme recall *Walkabout*. The image echoes Miranda's leitmotif of 'a dream within a dream': both humans and animals are freed from fear, representing an Eden-like innocence only now recognised and re-enacted in dreams. The close-up cinematography is once more in the style of the modern nature documentary, showing both the animal and the environment as a symbiotic whole (*Appendix: compilation XXIX*).

The objective animal image is next employed when Michael returns to the rock determined to find the missing girls. As Michael runs determinedly through the bush, his sole focus on the rock ahead, the pace of the sequence is tempered by cut-ins of the animals he is oblivious to: an extreme close-up of a spider weaving its web; a cockatoo; a lorikeet and a koala. The birds, framed at eye level, sit unmoved, signifying their timeless belonging. The koala, perhaps necessarily shot from below in his perch at the top of the tree, effects a more cognisant image with a downward gaze that locks with that of the camera. This sequence represents a world that remains invisible to the backward-looking Michael (*Appendix: excerpt XXX*).

At the memorial service for the missing girls and Miss McGraw, the congregation sing the hymn 'Rock of Ages', based on Isaiah 26:4, 'The Lord is the Rock eternal'. The lyrics take on added meaning within the context of the film:

*Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee;
Let the water and the blood,
From Thy wounded side which flowed,*

*Be of sin the double cure;
Save from wrath and make me pure.*

*Not the labor of my hands
Can fulfill Thy law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone;
Thou must save, and Thou alone.*

*Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to the cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly;
Wash me, Savior, or I die.*

*While I draw this fleeting breath,
When mine eyes shall close in death,
When I soar to worlds unknown,
See Thee on Thy judgment throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee.*

(words: Augustus M. Toplady, 1776)

While the ironic reference to the fate of the missing is clear – Miranda, Marion and Miss McGraw do indeed ‘hide’ themselves in the cleft of the Rock of Ages - the lyrics also echo other themes and motifs. The phrases ‘Nothing in my hand I bring’ and ‘Naked, come to Thee for dress’ can be understood as articulations of the need for white Australians to divest themselves of the trappings of their old colonial culture in order to flourish in the new: only Miranda is portrayed in the film as ready to ‘soar to worlds unknown’. More generally, ‘Not the labor of my hands, Can fulfill Thy law’s demands’ evokes the theme of man against nature prevalent in the majority of Australian landscape films and the paradox of the ‘semi-tamed, yet essentially untamable’ land (Gibson, 1992, p.67).

My Brilliant Career (1979), directed by Gillian Armstrong, follows the struggles of a young girl, Sybylla, as she tries to find balance between the demands of her sex and developing her latent talent as a writer. Adapted from the Miles Franklin novel of 1900 and set in 1897, Sybylla's search for identity translates equally well as an expression of Australia's burgeoning nationalism at the turn of the century and the nationalist revival fostered by Gough Whitlam's Labor government. The reverberations of the European Suffragette movement, and the 1970s resurgence of feminism contemporaneous with the time of the film's production, are also evident in the film.

The opening sequences of the film set the premise: life for women in the bush is too dull and dreary for someone of intellectual ambition like Sybylla. As she closes the shutters against the impending dust storm, so as to continue with her writing, Sybylla's character is drawn initially more through her detachment from her environment than any connection with it, but this changes as she develops through the course of the film. Armstrong frames her representations of nature in the traditional subjective; with compositions that echo the mode of Impressionism, if not so much the style, in their depictions of human interaction with the environment. The animal image is employed symbolically, underlining characterisations and themes through oppositions of the pastoral or imported against the wild or indigenous.

In *My Brilliant Career*, pastoral animals represent the drudgery of country life for the female. Sybylla expresses her existential discontent to her sister while milking a cow. At the Beecham's ball, in reply to the comment, 'I see Furloe's bought himself a very fine bull', Sybylla displays her feistiness with a knowing quip: 'That should make a few cows

happy'. When Frank Hawden proposes to Sybylla, they are sitting on the fence of a sheep enclosure in a pastoral *mise-en-scène*. The connotations are of safety and low-level contentment at the cost of cultivation and constraint. As Sybylla demures, Frank falls off the fence into the sheep, back into the world of his own offerings which would gladly be taken up by myriad other women, barely distinguishable from each, who would willingly follow him sheep-like into marriage and 'respectability', unlike the film's independent and individualistic heroine (*Appendix: compilation XXXI*).

In contrast, Harry Beecham's proposal comes in the gaming trophy room; a much darker, more dangerous and erotic *mise-en-scène*, with guns and whips and taxidermied fish mounted on the walls. Sybylla hits Harry with a horsewhip. While Harry has indeed been hunted as the object of her attentions, Sybylla feels the need to defend herself from what she perceives as an inadequate declaration of love. The *mise-en-scène* can be seen as representing Sybylla's refusal to surrender to the 'hunting and collecting' mentality of the period (Griffith cited in Mulligan & Hill, 2001, p. 22), which categorised women and animals alike as trophies of exotica that, once collected and stuffed, would be placed to gather dust in museum-like collections. More specifically, the scene articulates Sybylla's apprehension about Harry and the longevity of his affection, as well as her fear of the enervating effects of marriage (*Appendix: excerpt XXXII*).

A scene within an aviary holding native lorikeets makes the connection between women and caged birds. Inside the cage, in an overhead shot, Sybylla says:

Beautiful creatures. Fortunate, aren't they?
Everyday they get their food. They don't have to
look for water in a dried-up creek - scratch for a

living, like all our countrymen, forced on the road
to beg.

Sybylla identifies with the native birds, for not only are they originally wild, they are also indigenous. Like Miranda in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Sybylla is forward-looking, identifying herself as a true Australian. The dialogue suggests her own situation to be analogous to that of the birds, with Sybylla considering the possible benefits of a married life with Harry in which she would lose her freedom but gain security. Aunt Beecham replies, 'Perhaps they're meant to counter-balance the ugly things in life', subjectively seeing only the pleasure-giving beauty of the birds without the disadvantages of their existence. In the following scene, Mrs Beecham is depicted making a collage with Kookaburra feathers – a representation of a colonial mindset that felt the need to deconstruct the Australian environment and rearrange it to effect its own cultural codes of subjective and subjected decoration. At the end of the film, as Sybylla places her first manuscript in the post-box on the way to a publisher, intimations of triumph are underscored by the cries and whistles of the Australian bush dawn chorus (*Appendix: compilation XXXIII*).

Pet animals are also used for characterisation in the film. Perhaps to show that the prickly Sybylla is ultimately approachable, she is depicted as being liked by animals. In Mrs Beecham's study, a King Charles spaniel cosies up to her. Later in the film, as she writes in the branches of a tree, Sybylla has a black kitten in her lap. Harry Beecham's considerate nature is depicted in his caring for his dog by giving it water. The action is witnessed by Sybylla, and through her viewpoint, the scene also be reads as a

premonition of the subservient and dependent nature of a future relationship with him (*Appendix: compilation XXXIV*).

The farmyard animals at the McSwats imbue the *mise-en-scène* with an atmosphere of chaos as pigs, geese, chickens, cockerels and dogs roam in a cacophany of their own calls and cries, underlining the chaos of the family to whom Sybylla is stationed as governess. In a scene where Sybylla rescues a calf stuck in mud, Armstrong makes reference back to a 1936 film featuring another strong-willed character: the cattleman's daughter Marion from *Rangle River* (Dir. Clarence Badger). Contrasting with the earlier scenario, in which Marion's future husband's actions appear sexist and condescending to modern sensibilities, Harry is portrayed as fully confident of Sybylla's ability to rectify the situation (*Appendix: compilation XXXV*). Sybylla's headstrong nature and feminist confidence is also depicted in her driving of the buggy: she is unafraid of handling the horses at speed. Foreshadowing later developments in their relationship, she 'takes the reins' from Harry early on in their acquaintance, and later leaves Frank Houghton stranded in a field in order to meet with the true object of her affections (*Appendix: compilation XXXVI*).

Set in 1901, *We of the Never Never* (1982), directed by Igor Auzins, recreates the experiences set out in Jeannie Gunn's diaries of her year in the Northern Territory with her station manager husband. Echoing one of the early scenes of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, the film opens with the protagonist having her corset tightly laced on her wedding day, suggesting the film to be, like *Picnic* and *My Brilliant Career*, ostensibly about overcoming the expectations of female constraint. Then, as the opening credits unfold,

there is a cut against the linearity of the narrative. Now the camera follows a lone figure on a galloping horse across a flat northern landscape framed at the distance of a bird's-eye viewpoint. The landscape is abstracted, a sequence of earth-toned patterns reminiscent of the 'dreaming paths' of Aboriginal art which seek to describe the landscape from the inside out (*Appendix: excerpt XXXVII*).

As with *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *My Brilliant Career*, *We of the Never Never* can be read as an analogy for the sensibilities and ideological shift necessary for the successful passage of the European Australian into the independent Australian; fully integrated with the physicality of the new home. Kerr describes the central character, Jeannie, as:

at once a woman clinging to the niceties of her Victorian heritage; later, and largely through her empathy with local Aborigines, the Englishness of her old persona gives way to the subtle emergence of someone new – the Australia outback woman. (1995, p. 115)

Auzin's location shooting, at Elsey Station near Katherine, has been commended for its 'careful attentions to the nuances of the land, its textures, moods and sounds' and avoiding 'outback clichés' (Maksay, 1984, pp. 422-4). Gary Hansen won an AFI award for photography on the film and his work is noted for his use of natural light (Maksay, 1984, pp. 422-4).

As Jeannie Gunn and her husband, Aeneas, travel through the bush on the way to their new home, a sequence from life at the station is cut-in. Fast-paced editing and close-ups effect a confusion of blade upon hide which serves initially to distance the viewer from the understanding of the sequence as a portrayal of a bull's castration, symbolically

foreshadowing the resentments and intentions of the station hands in the face of the arrival of not only a new manager, but one with a wife in tow (*Appendix: excerpt XXXVIII*). Returning to the couple's journey, the subsequent camp-fire sequence, described by Maksay as 'one of the most potent scenes in the film' (Maksay cited in Kerr, 1995, p. 115), contrasts greatly in atmosphere with the aggressive energy and stark symbolism of the previous scene. The use of natural light from the campfire has been described as lending a 'surreal' tone (Maksay, 1984, 422-4), but the subject matter of the dialogue and the diegetic sound ground the scene in a realism that eschews the techniques of a sublime or romantic portrayal.

As the Gunns sit in a group comprising of both white and indigenous farm-hands, animal calls are not only heard but also commented upon as the main topic of conversation. The bush is presented as more than background, leitmotif or attendant character – it *in* the dialogue of experience and identity; an integral part of the whole. A marsh bird calls and is identified as such: 'You don't hear many anymore – won't be enough bush to bury them in'. As frogs call, their cries are respectfully imitated by the Aborigines and developed into a chant of their own. This image of symbiosis forms the backdrop to Jeannie's awakening to 'the magic of the never never'. Auzin's use of sound here can be contrasted with that of Weir in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. Weir uses natural sounds – the buzzing of flies, cicadas, the rumbling of a slowed-down earthquake – in the sublime style of the 'low, confused, uncertain' (Burke cited in Morris, 1998, p.249) to disorientate and maintain the atmosphere of uncertainty necessary to the functions of the film's genre: Auzin uses sound to bring the realities of the landscape into sharper focus (*Appendix: excerpt XXXIX*).

Similarly, Auzin's visual representations are strongly grounded in a realism uncompromised by nostalgic or mythic evocations of the bush. The Gunn homestead is surrounded by pillars of termite mounds; an image which initially startles in its failure to conform to an imaginary of previous representations of settler life. The pillars remain more than merely attendant in the scenes of homestead life throughout the film; their presence in the composition of shots lends an architectural integrity equally important as that of the homestead building itself (*Appendix: compilation XL*).

As in *My Brilliant Career*, horses denote the male in *We of the Never Never*, and they are used analogously to represent both Aeneas and the station hands. The station-hands watch the newly-arrived Aeneas break-in a horse in the same way that the men intend to 'break-in' and train their new station manager. Brumbies charge through the homestead signifying the potential dangers of Aeneas' lack of control, until they are safely enclosed. Aeneas finally proves himself to be worthy of his position on horseback while mustering cattle. Station-hand Jack reveals his own attitude as, watched by Jeannie, he 'flags' a horse to quieten it. He explains the apparent failure of the technique as the horse becomes more unsettled by claiming that Jeannie 'makes the horse nervous' as 'he ain't never seen a woman before' (*Appendix: compilation XLI*).

The character of Jeannie is drawn through opposition: initially she is often at odds with the white station employees – and the Chinese cook – and the pastoral animals in their care, yet she quickly develops harmonious relationships with the Aborigines and the indigenous wildlife. In contrast to the sublime perspective, unpredictability and danger come in the guise of the imported, pastoral animals, not in the unknown of the

indigenous. While out in the bush, Jeannie is charged by a bull, but saved by a shot from station-hand Jeff who fells the animal as she attempts to scramble to safety up a tree (*Appendix: excerpt XLII*).

Auzin's style of naturalistic lighting, focus, composition and the representation of animals in their natural habitat incorporates many of the elements of the 'ecological perspective' (Carter, 1999, p. 6), obviating the need for sequences or cuts-ins featuring small-scale animals to underline the environmental theme. Only at the water-hole sequence, where Jeannie bathes in front of an audience of Aboriginal women, does Auzin employ this technique in the image of a monitor lizard, suggesting that animals are watching too. Later, as Jeannie joins the women in the stalking, catching, cooking and eating of a blind goanna, the sequence conveys a naturalistic immediacy, working to portray the group as comfortable with each other and the conventions of their disparate cultures. Just before Aeneas returns to the homestead with the fever that will ultimately kill him, Jeannie is seen walking loose-haired as she learns the Aboriginal names for the birds around her. The image is one of a woman made strong by entering fully into the environment, with an ability to perceive the 'new' country beyond the limiting ideology of the colonial past – and it can be inferred that this is a woman who will 'never never' leave the bush, whatever happens (*Appendix: compilation XLIII*).

While Jeannie Gunn's story is one of hope finding a home within a new context, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (1978), directed by Fred Schepisi, recounts the hopelessness of the disposed and marginalised. Adapted from a novel by Thomas Keneally - who also wrote the screenplay - the film is based on real events occurring at the turn of the

century: 'unlike most of the other period pieces of the late 1970s the film deals with matters of pressing moral concern ... the destruction of a race' (McFarlane in Murray, 1995, p. 16). Images of oppression and 'social enclosure' (Turner, 1986, p. 70) play against images of landscape that have been described both as holding a 'mute eloquence' (McFarlane in Murray, 1995, p. 16) and inviting a 'patronising fetishism' in the viewer through 'beautiful bush tourism' (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 119).

The film opens with a scene of Jimmie and an Aboriginal elder hunting, storytelling round a campfire and clearing a water-hole in a prologue which places the indigenous within their original context (*Appendix: excerpt XLIV*). There are close-up shots of a goanna and skink in 'ecological perspective', however, Schepisi does not reserve this technique for indigenous representations, or indeed living animals, as in the films previously discussed. He also uses extreme close-ups to underline the everyday interactions of the white Australians with animals, pointing to the symbolism therein - a practice which drew criticism of the film by some commentators for 'announcing its themes with undue explicitness' (McFarlane in Murray, 1995, p. 16). In this manner, a close-up of a chicken's head as the axe falls in decapitation, intercut with Jimmie's negotiations with a stallholder for the conditions of his first job, prefigures his future ill-treatment, as well the murder of the selector's family. Later, an extreme close-up of a sheep's innards as it is butchered by the stallholder drives the point home: as the whites have 'ripped the guts out' of traditional Aboriginal society, so Jimmie's personal hopes for the future will ultimately be eviscerated. Butchery is used again in a later scene which identifies the local butcher as the local hangman too. Framed by hooks and hanging meat, he says 'I'm just part of the apparatus' while handing two neatly wrapped packages over

the counter to his prying customers. As in *Walkabout*, butchery is used as an analogy for white detachment. Many of the animal images in *Jimmie Blacksmith* are of food animals – rabbits, chickens, pigs - underscoring the cruel irony of Jimmie's starvation at the hands of his dishonest employers (*Appendix: compilation XLV*).

After an Aborigine whom he has helped arrest is murdered in his cell by his new boss, policeman Farrell, Jimmie expresses his guilt by burning his own clothes along with those of the dead man. The narrative then jumps to his new position as a hand in sheep-shearing shed. The opening shot of the scene is a close-up of a sheep's fleece as it is shorn away from the skin: like the sheep, Jimmie is now vulnerable, naked without the protection of his former optimism. Both are held in the white man's grip, powerless over their future fate (*Appendix: excerpt XLVI*).

Schepisi also makes use of horses throughout the film to represent white men's power and condescension by framing those mounted on horseback - the shareholders, policemen and trackers - from the lower, subservient position of the Aboriginal point of view. In contrast, after their wedding, Jimmie leads his pregnant wife Gilda on a borrowed horse. The composition of the grouping recalls classical representations of Mary and Joseph on the road to Nazareth: the promise of an idyll soon to be shattered (*Appendix: excerpt XLVII*).

Following the murder of the Newby women, Jimmie's group is circled ominously by a black bird as they cross the river. Then, a herd of cattle stampede in front of them, from right to left across the screen, signifying the chaos and confusion visited upon the pastoral society by Jimmie's actions. Although this right to left movement represents

regression in the film language of Western cinema, as will be discussed in chapter 3, for the Aboriginal group the stampede signals progression, for they realise they can use it to their advantage to cover their tracks as they escape into the bush. In this sequence, Schepisi effectively employs a single animal representation to simultaneously convey the opposing perspectives of the whites and the Aborigines (*Appendix: excerpt XLVIII*).

In the scene after the shooting of Mr and Mrs Lewis and the baby, Jimmie and his half-brother Mort are depicted in ceremonial body-paint, mostly hidden within the branches of a tree. They appear to merge with their environment; the white face-markings providing the only reference to their position within the frame. Explaining the motivation for his direction at this point, Schepisi says: 'I tried to construct every shot so you had to look for the Aboriginal in the frame before you found him, because he was so much a part of it' (Schepisi cited in Turner, p 70). The sequence includes an extreme close-up of a moth trembling on Mort's arm. With colouring and markings to match the bark of the trees exactly, the moth has an ability for camouflage that the fugitive brothers may now wish for but can never attain. The moth can also be read as symbolising the men's fragility and the vulnerability of their situation which has rendered their lives as ephemeral as an insect's. From this point in the film onwards, Schepisi employs images of indigenous insects in a style which echoes Roeg's work in *Walkabout*: the animals are depicted objectively, filling the screen as they react to their natural environment (*Appendix: excerpt IL*).

Images of insects are used again after the court hearing of one of Jimmie's initial fugitive troupe. Shots of black leeches inching across wood and ants scrambling in disorientation

amidst a disturbed nest form the linking cuts in the movement of the narrative from the court scene to the forest, where Jimmie and Mort are holding the school-teacher hostage. The brother's intentions, stymied by guilt and uncertainty are as directionless as the leeches'; meanwhile, like the ants, the white community have mobilised into frenzied but directed activity, and they will soon be catching up with their quarry (*Appendix: excerpt L*).

At the desecrated Aboriginal sacred site shots of a skink, scorpion and beetle are intercut with human action as the men attempt to reposition the ancient stones. A parallel is drawn between the two worlds, divided only by scale, as the beetle moves a stone. The beetle then hides under the stone, entering into the landscape in a way denied to the protagonists. The use of sound is noteworthy in this sequence: disjointed instrumental notes are combined with the buzzing and scraping of crickets, cicadas and flies to create a 'sublime' soundscape in the manner of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. This is also the only point in the film where Schepisi ventures away from lyrical realism into expressionism (*Appendix: excerpt LI*). The final symbolic insect representation is of a cicada. Jimmie has been shot in the face and the trackers are close on his trail. Four shots of the insect are presented from various angles; and the final, face-on image presents like a death-mask, foreshadowing Jimmie's own death (*Appendix: excerpt LII*).

The film ends with Jimmie locked in a prison-cell awaiting his certain fate. The end-credit sequence acknowledges his death with aerial shots of white birds taking flight from the forest, resonating with the final images in *Jedda* (1955, Dir. Charles Chauvel). The editing works to articulate the birds' confusion and the theme of Aboriginal alienation

present in the film: they flock in different directions, away from their perches, then back again, not knowing where to settle. The birds are indigenous ibis; white bodied and black-faced, and were it not for their disquiet and confusion, they could be more positively understood as symbolising the hope of reconciliation and coexistence. However, the final message seems to be that both Aborigines and whites are now inextricably co-joined, but unable to find a comfortable resting place (*Appendix: excerpt LIII*).

Animal symbolism is thus used extensively and overtly in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*. As commentators have noted, the symbolism appears clichéd and cloying at times, for example the use of the robin feeding its chicks before the abduction of the schoolmaster outside the school, and the idyllic pastoral image of the fore-grounded goat in a flowering meadow before the shooting of Mrs Lewis and her baby (*Appendix: compilation LIV*). However, Schepisi's use of the close-up was innovative for Australian films of the period, and his symbolic use of insects, while echoing that of Roeg and Weir, shows a development of the representational style. His portrayal of the leeches, ants and cicada in particular, make a move away from the stark realism of the ecological perspective towards a lyrical approach, adding another element to the repertoire of animal representations.

The characterisation of Jeannie Gunn in *We of the Never Never* - as a woman intent on transforming physically unfamiliar surroundings into her own homeland by internalising the 'see-able' and making it 'sayable' - foreshadows a development in the depiction of female protagonists and their relationship with the landscape evident in two films

produced some two decades later: *The Goddess of 1967* (Dir. Clara Law, 2001) and *Japanese Story* (Dir. Sue Brooks, 2003). With narratives set in the present day, these films mark a progression from the theme of nascent nationhood to that of nationalism and the exploration of white Australian identity in the context of Australia's emergence on the world stage.

Both *The Goddess of 1967* and *Japanese Story* are 'road-movies' with plots revolving around an Australian woman guiding a Japanese man through the outback. The premise of their respective narratives predicates a characterisation of the female protagonist as a woman fully 'at home' in her environment. In *The Goddess of 1967*, the young woman, 'B.G.', is blind. The conceit heightens the depiction of her knowledge of the countryside, and the animals within it, to an expression suggestive of the spiritual. This elevated connection to nature links B.G. with Miranda from *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, although the style in which the disposition is conveyed differs markedly in *The Goddess of 1967*. The landscape of the outback presented in *The Goddess of 1967* is hyperbolic. The colours of the sky and the land sing out in saturated hues, while the accompanying sounds of hearty birdsong, animal noises and emphatic diegetic and non-diegetic music serve to complete the lavish realisation (*Appendix: compilation LV*).

Human/animal relationships are employed throughout *The Goddess of 1967* as signifiers of attitude and circumstance. Flashbacks describing B.G.'s troubled past tell of the many ways in which she has been abused and betrayed by her own family and strangers. In one such sequence, animals are shown to offer the protection previously denied to her by her own mother. After the attempted rape by Drummer Boy, B.G. is revealed asleep under a

tree, curled in the foetal position, surrounded by a silent guard of dingoes (*Appendix: excerpt LVI*). This tableau-vivant, highly stylised through the use of colour, music and overhead framing, exemplifies the ‘fairytale’ flavour of the film as a whole. Nature and animals in *The Goddess of 1967* are imbued with a vivacity bordering on the hyper-real in a manner reminiscent of the ‘fairytale brightness’ (Nowra, 2003, p. 6) of *Walkabout*, as previously discussed, even though the effect is achieved through quite different cinematographic techniques in each film.

The male protagonist, ‘J.M.’, who arrives on B.G.’s doorstep from Japan to buy the eponymous Citroen DS, is first introduced through vignettes of his life in Tokyo: primarily caring for his collection of exotic reptiles (*Appendix: compilation LVII*). The metaphoric connection between the mode of J.M.’s existence and that of his pets is overtly made as he reconstitutes their freeze-dried dinner of mice with boiling water, then sits amongst the vivaria to eat his own bowl of noodles prepared in the same way. J.M. is as separated from nature as his snakes and lizards: his small, sterile apartment his own vivarium. Yet even in captivity, the animals possess a visual intensity; an essential vitality which is mirrored in J.M., both in Tokyo and later in Australia. This vitality in the characterisation of J.M. points to the film’s theme of materialism versus spirituality, as identified by Villella, where ‘desire for the ultimate material possession eventually translates into a spiritual and deep connection with B.G.’ (Villella, 2001, ¶9), and through B.G., to nature itself.

B.G.’s blindness gives rise to several thematic strands and their articulation through metaphoric allusion. References to eyes and seeing abound. The headlights of a Citroen

DS are known to enthusiasts as ‘eyes’, and J.M. makes a point of asking how many the Goddess has before confirming his desire to purchase. The car functions as a magical vessel, guiding and protecting the protagonists through the physical journey that is also a journey through their past. The film’s flashbacks and B.G.’s quest to find and confront her father speak of the power of past events to ‘blind’ one to the promise of the future. When J.M. finally complies with B.G.’s request to try driving with his eyes closed in the final sequence of the film, the implication is that ‘blind leaps of faith’ are only possible once the problems of the past have been resolved.

B.G.’s intuitive connection with her surroundings is conveyed as she navigates J.M. through the outback with telepathic certitude. Despite her blindness, or perhaps because of it, the landscape and its animals are eminently ‘see-able’ to B.G. Her lack of outward sight is turned inwards; manifesting as insight. The strongest portrayal of the intimate bond she holds with the landscape occurs when J.M. spots a lizard on the road and, still retaining his detached collectors’ perspective, he stops to inspect it. B.G. is able to recognise the lizard as a ‘bog-eye’ solely from its behaviour towards J.M., described through his cries of shock and pain, and she also knows how to deal with it. J.M.’s distance from nature is signified by the white gloves he puts on before handling the animal (*Appendix: excerpt LVIII*).

As in *My Brilliant Career* and *We of the Never Never*, scenes of domestic animals running amuck are employed in *The Goddess of 1967* to suggest an imbalance or dysfunction in the protagonist’s life. The ultimate breakdown of B.G.’s relationship with her father, already grotesquely distorted by incest, her mother’s suicide and her

grandmother's murder, is signalled when cattle and pigs escape to roam freely through the property. By entering the winery and surrounding the Goddess, the animals make mockery of the symbols of propriety and sophistication comprising the facade of B.G.'s father's denial of his own aberrant behaviour (*Appendix: excerpt LIX*).

B.G.'s pre-occupation with death finds expression through animal imagery when she describes the sound of death as being that of insects when they 'crash themselves against the windscreen'. As in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, death is visually represented by a moth. When B.G. finally locates her father languishing in the darkness of a disused mine, the fragility of his remaining pretensions is symbolised in the decrepit display of once fine tableware. The shrivelled rats and lizards which comprise the waiting 'feast' on his table also tell of the depths to which this one-time gourmand has fallen. The lingering focus on B.G.'s careful exploration of the tableau, with its Dickensian echoes of Miss Haversham's fossilised wedding banquet in *Great Expectations*, also marks the point of her emotional transition. Like many of the scenes in the film, the formalism of the stylisation invites metaphorical interpretation, and here the concrete 'still life' suggests additional punning abstractions. With B.G.'s discovery of the table comes her realisation that while there is still life in the old man, he is spirituality paralysed as a consequence of his past behaviour; living a metaphysical still life. It is B.G.'s new-found feeling of pity towards her father which ultimately stops her from shooting him as she had intended to do. Her new perspective allows her to see that she can move forward in her own life without killing her father; that there is still life for her even if he continues to live (*Appendix: excerpt LX*).

The dramatic contrast between the stiff, dusty lifelessness of the dead animals in the mine and the insistent vivacity of the animal representations elsewhere exemplifies the way in which characters are defined in *The Goddess of 1967*; through their relationship with nature and animals. The moral corruption of B.G.'s father is reflected in the state of the animals that are his final companions, just as an ever present undertone of hope for the fate of the main protagonists is suggested by the exuberance of the landscape which surrounds them. For B.G., happiness eventuates when she is able to share her special connection with nature with another human; for J.M., when he is awakened to the power of a relationship with nature that goes beyond the materialism of collection.

Although *Japanese Story* falls outside the time frame identified as the focus of this study by a couple of years, the film is worth consideration as a site of comparison - not only with *The Goddess of 1967*, but also with the other films discussed in this chapter – for the themes it reprises and develops, and the role of animal representation in their expression. In *Japanese Story*, geologist Sandy is coerced into chauffeuring Japanese businessman Hiromitsu around the iron-ore mines of the Pilbara desert. Initially, the dramatic tension comes from a clash of cultural differences: mainly issues of gender and sexuality.

In contrast to Jeannie Gunn, Sandy is too well aware of her country's complexion and its temperamental dangers, and as a geologist, she knows, and can name, its very core elements. Indeed, she herself bears a name relating both to her profession and the elemental composition of much of her country's terrain. Her knowledge is less direct than Jeannie's, however, for her daily existence is urban and her geological knowledge applied to the business of designing computer software. The characterisation of Sandy, therefore,

transcends the traditions of the bush/city dichotomy: she is an urban woman with practical bush skills.

Hiromitsu, on the other hand, has no negative preconceptions regarding the journey. His enthusiasm for the space and freedom afforded by a landscape and lifestyle so different from that of his own country is unconstrained, and he remains heedless to Sandy's warnings. Driving off the map at Hiromitsu's insistence, they become bogged in the sand and spend a night stranded in the desert. Yet, despite being proved right in her caution, Sandy abandons her own reservations and adopts Hiromitsu's attitude, as the intimacy initiated by their night in the desert develops. While Sandy comes to appreciate her own landscape through the fresh eyes of another, her new perspective ultimately results in tragedy when Hiromitsu kills himself diving into a waterhole.

Until Hiromitsu's death, the implicit theme of the film is that of perception and the ways in which it not only defines, but also constrains, identity. After the tragedy, the exposition of Sandy's grief works to expand the theme into deeper territory. Her expression of sorrow and responsibility to Hiromitsu's widow, Yukiko, delivered as she is about to board a flight to Japan having collected her husband's body, resonates with the dialectic of the Reconciliation debate and the calls for an official apology from the Australian government to Indigenous Australians:

SANDY :

I'm so sorry, I should have ... I should have not
let it happen. It was my fault ... my
responsibility. I'm so sorry.

The reaction of Sandy's business partner to her statement – 'Christ! What d'you say *that* for?' – strongly suggests a fear of the possible legal consequences. Again, the sentiment can be taken as an allusion to the Reconciliation debate: this time as an echo of the oppositional rationale. Yukiko responds to Sandy's apology by handing her an envelope containing photographs of herself and Hiromitsu taken during their excursion. Previous scenes have established both Sandy's thwarted desire to access the film from Hiromitsu's camera before it can be developed and, subsequently, Yukiko's contemplation of the printed images and their connotations. The presentation of the photographs after the apology also invokes meaning beyond the immediate indication of the narrative. On one level, the act can be viewed as a gesture of understanding and forgiveness from one woman to another. By giving her the photographs and acknowledging the intimate nature of her grief, Yukiko is also offering Sandy a starting-point from which to begin her healing. On another level, the scene works as an allegory for the possibility of indigenous and non-indigenous reconciliation. Framing *Japanese Story* within a post-Mabo context, Collins perceives the same undertones when she identifies the film as articulating a social ideology which:

demands that frontier history be remembered and worked through, that settler Australia do the work of mourning entailed in giving up a form of emotional insularity which turns a blind eye to our place on the map and to the myth of *terra nullius*. (Collins, 2003, ¶12)

In addition to the similarities in characterisation between Jeannie Gunn and Sandy outlined above, like the opening credit sequence of *We of the Never Never*, *Japanese Story* begins with abstracted images of the landscape reminiscent of Aboriginal art. In

Japanese Story, a montage of the striking patterns formed by the whites and browns of iron-ore country introduces the geological motif of the film. However, in contrast to *We of the Never Never*, the human figure is absent from the terrain. The significance of *Japanese Story* to the study of the animal image is in the film's articulation of *terra nullius*. The *mise-en-scène* itself is a representation of the *terra nullius* of the historic white imagination; as a landscape in which nothing indigenous exists. No animals feature in the film at all, and the only reference to Indigenous Australians is presented tangentially; when Hiromitsu briefly plays 'Treaty' by Yothu Yindi on a CD in his car. Devoid of indigenous life, the sterility of the landscape foregrounds and echoes the protagonists' stunted spirituality.

The absence of animals contributes to the persistent undertone of grief evident throughout *Japanese Story*, even during the more upbeat sequences. As an absence, the role, or non-role, of the animals is not immediately apparent, but works on an unconscious level. The effect can be brought into relief by comparing the *mise-en-scène* of the waterhole sequence in *Japanese Story* with those of *Walkabout* as the settings in both films are very similar. Before Hiromitsu's accident, the mood at the waterhole is ostensibly that of joyous celebration. Yet, without any sign of animals, the atmosphere has a hollow quality and an artificiality which denies the scene the full power of a pre-lapsarian idyll; a power which is achieved in *Walkabout*. This atmosphere, of course, accords with the undertones of sterility and melancholy or 'spiritual malaise' (Collins, 2003, ¶12) which permeate the entire film, as well as functioning more specifically as a foreshadowing of the impending tragedy.

In the films considered above, the representations of the animals within the landscape are, in the main, employed metaphorically as articulations of various degrees of ‘belonging’ in narratives centred around the concerns of emerging nationhood and nationalism. These films also exhibit a historic progression in their style of cinematography and design of the *mise-en-scène*, as they are informed by sublime and Impressionist aesthetics to varying extents. The sublime aesthetic of ‘tranquillity shadowed with horror’ (Burke cited in Morris p. 247) is most evident in the cinematography and soundscapes of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, as is the Impressionist stylisation of Weir’s evocations of the human within the landscape. The Impressionist aesthetic, but not the sublime, is also to be found in many sequences throughout *My Brilliant Career*, for example in the punting and ball scenes, and to a lesser extent in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, most notably in the portrayal of selectors’ cricket match (*Appendix: compilation LXI*). In *We of the Never Never*, Auzin adheres exclusively to a sharp-focussed realism, which may border on the ‘surreal’ (Maksay, 1984, 422-4) at times, but consistently eschews sublime or romantic evocations.

In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, *We of the Never Never* and *The Goddess of 1967*, themes of alienation, belonging, oppression and escapism are given expression beyond the abstractions of the sublime aesthetic through the animal images and the human-animal relationships they present. The influence of *Walkabout* on the style of these representations can be seen in all four films; primarily in their use of objective framing, scale and sound. While Armstrong does not employ the ecological perspective in *My Brilliant Career*, she does use distinctions between imported pastoral animals and

indigenous animals metaphorically and symbolically to delineate characterisations and in the expression of themes, in the same mode, if not style, as the other films. These films address not so much the challenge of the landscape itself, but the challenge of perceiving the landscape and, consequently, the detail of the animals within it, as representations of national identity. The importance of these films, therefore, in the analysis of the representation of the animal image, is in their reflexivity. In depicting the dynamics of emerging nationhood in this way, they too engage in the 'struggle to reconstitute a way of seeing and reappropriate descriptive power' (Morris, 1998, p. 243).

In contrast to the Eurocentric representations prevalent prior to the 1970s, the pastoral is portrayed as neither potentially nurturing nor placid in these films. Even in *My Brilliant Career*, which places greater focus on the intellectual rather than the physical challenges of life in the bush, images of pastoral animals signify the negative. In *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* they are used symbolically as images of confinement and doom. In *We of the Never Never* and *The Goddess of 1967* the pastoral animals themselves take on some of the characteristics of the sublime as portents of chaos and confusion.

In *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, most of the animal images are used to express what Berger understands as 'that aspect of human inwardness which has remained natural, or at least tends or longs to become natural once more' where the 'image of a wild animal becomes the starting-point of a daydream' (Berger, 1980, p. 15). The images of animals presented in the ecological perspective can be read as reconnecting the landscape with pre-colonial signification, thereby inferring indigeneity as 'part of the meaning of Australian modernity' (Carter, 1998, p. 95). These representations, like those of *Walkabout*, both

reflect, and allow room for, the development of post-colonial changes in attitudes towards the indigenous, albeit more obliquely.

The use of the ecological perspective in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, however, can not be interpreted as a positive articulation of the possibility of belonging. Indeed, it could be argued that in his use of the indigenous animal image to signify Aboriginality, Schepisi only departs cinematographically from the conventions of thematic representation typical of Australian films pre-*Walkabout*. Despite their re-presentation within a framework that seeks to reinstate the importance, if not the beauty, of such animals, the metaphorical use of insects to convey the psychological states of the Aboriginal protagonists is particularly problematic – as, perhaps, are all white representations of Aboriginality - in their suggestion that parallels may be drawn between animals traditionally on the lowest rung of the ladder of western symbolic order and the indigenous spirit. But these images accord with the uncompromising message of the film as a portrayal of systemic genocide. Images of pastoral animals in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* not only differ from the conventional as ominous portents, but more specifically as ominous portents articulating an Aboriginal viewpoint. The images of the chicken's head and the sheep's innards, for example, are indicated through editing to be those of Jimmie's perspective. The pragmatism of the relationship between white Australians and their pastoral animals describes Jimmie's realisation that his own existence is valued in the same way. Reconsidered in this context, much of the symbolism in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* can be acquitted of the fault of cliché which has clouded previous discussion.

All the films analysed above feature either women or Aborigines as the main protagonists. As with *Walkabout*, these narratives of the marginalised more readily uncover the 'self-identifications of the dominant culture' (Baker, 1993, p. 125). A high proportion of the films of the late 70s and 80s were adaptations of novels or diaries; a consequence, to a certain extent, of the AFC's demand for 'quality' depictions of Australian nationhood. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *My Brilliant Career* and *We of the Never Never* are adaptations of novels written by women: *The Goddess of 1967* and *Japanese Story* were both scripted and directed by women. This may account for the themes and use of animal representations, for as Mulligan and Hill observe, after Lawson and Patterson, the next generation of writers to tackle themes of the bush and the environment were women: 'perhaps more women than men were prepared to contemplate the dark side of the colonial experience' (2001, p. 72). And perhaps women are more readily able to recognise the importance of the animals in the landscape as the fixtures and fittings of their new home.

Textural analysis privileging the animal image contests traditional interpretations of these films as portrayals of the land as 'definitively sublime and suprasocial' (Gibson, 1992, p. 68) by revealing tropes of ambiguity and negotiation. Given this alternate reading, the films become explorations of belonging through acceptance *of* and *into* the landscape. In *My Brilliant Career*, the final scene showing Sybylla contemplating her future as she looks across the landscape underscores her decision to trust her environment in an existential sense: to trust that she will be able to flourish intellectually as a wild being, unattached, unconfined and consequently unprotected by the traditional structures of her

society. In the *Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, Jimmie can neither belong in white society nor in the landscape in the traditional indigenous sense.

The analyses in this chapter also question dominant commentary's interpretations of these films, exemplified by Lucas, as characterising the feminine (or the marginalised, in the case of *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*) through representations of 'passivity' in a 'mute landscape' (Lucas, 1998, p. 140). Such interpretations have marginalised the films themselves by failing to recognise the narratives as articulations of Australian identity of equal significance as those found in narratives portraying the male relationship with the landscape. The expressions found in the films are necessarily reflections of the dominant social attitudes towards their subjects at the time of their production. Yet even within these parameters, the protagonists in the films produced in the 1970s and 1980s, as discussed above, exhibit a strong intellectual engagement with the landscape. Although the quality of the activity is not as physical or dominant as that characteristic of male representations, the animal-centred reading highlights the ways in which representations of the feminine and marginalised can be regarded as active and powerful in their own right.

The Goddess of 1967 and *Japanese Story* are significant for the representational and thematic shifts they display. In both films, the characterisation of the female protagonist has developed into that of a woman at home in her environment and confident of her role within it. The character of B.G. has progressed even further, being at one with the landscape, while Sandy is seen to be working towards that aim. As in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *My Brilliant Career*, *We of the Never Never* and *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*,

The Goddess of 1967 and *Japanese Story* explore the concept of nationhood through narratives of the marginalised and the vulnerable. The men that the female protagonists guide through the outback are marginal on two counts. First, they are foreigners and consequently lack local knowledge. Secondly, they are Asian men and as such, culturally more passive than not only Australian men, but Australian women too. In both *The Goddess of 1967* and *Japanese Story* it is the women who take the sexual initiative.

While the social positioning of the protagonists in all the films discussed in this chapter are similar, the narratives and thematic concerns of *The Goddess of 1967* and *Japanese Story* have moved on from those of emerging nationhood. They are narratives of emerging cosmopolitanism: explorations of white Australia's global identity and the ways in which white Australians not only see, but also the ways in which they are seen. In B.G. and Sandy the traditional qualities of the pragmatic outback woman take on a fresh, active stance as they journey through their country; a characterisation which approaches that of the representational tradition of men and the landscape in Australian cinema, as discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 3

Representations of masculinity: animals in the landscapes of self-actualisation

This chapter will consider the animal image within the more physically active representations of men and the challenges posed by the landscape through analyses of *The Man From Snowy River*, *Crocodile Dundee*, *Mad Dog Morgan* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*. As Gibson observes in his discussion of the role of the landscape in Australian myths of settlement in *South of the West: Postcolonialism and the Narrative Construction of Australia*, a Hegelian view of self-actualisation is apposite to such an analysis:

Man realises himself through *practical* activity, since he has the impulse to express himself, and so again to recognise himself, in things that are at first simply represented to himself as externally existent. He attains this by altering external things and impressing on them the stamp of his own inner nature, so that he rediscovers his own character in them. (Hegel cited in Gibson, 1992, p. 67. Original emphasis)

While Gibson interprets ‘man’ in the modern sense to include both men and women, this phenomenological concept is particularly pertinent when considering representations of specifically male identity in conjunction with the animal image in Australian films since the Revival. Contrasting with the themes of physical passivity and reciprocal acceptance

of the landscape in female and Aboriginal representation as previously discussed, for the male protagonist belonging and expedient existence in the environment is expressed through a physically active relationship with the surroundings. Rose Lucas explores key representations of the male and masculinity in Australian films since the Revival in her article '*Dragging It Out: Tales of Masculinity in Australian Cinema, from 'Crocodile Dundee' to 'Priscilla, Queen of the Desert'*' (1998). Lucas' identification of 'the more conventional or stereotypical' characteristics of these representations include articulations of 'activity and taming ... in opposition to the "feminised" attributes of ... passivity and the muted landscape' (1998, pp. 139-140).

Straightforward examples of these characteristics can be found in the action within the narrative of *The Man From Snowy River* (1982), directed by George Miller. Censured as 'reactionary' and 'simple-minded' (McFarlane & Mayer, 1992, p. 195), dominant commentary holds that *The Man From Snowy River* provides 'an archetypal example of conventional representations' (Lucas, 1998, p. 140), in which traditional notions of the bush as the testing ground for non-indigenous Australian male identity inform the rite of passage motif. Universalisation of male identity is indeed flagged by the film's title, directly borrowed from Banjo Patterson's iconic ballad. As the film's narrative is more 'inspired by' than even 'loosely based upon' the original, the title serves to announce its mythical intentions rather than its story-line. The anonymity of the protagonist within the title, signified generically by gender and only specified by a connection to place, underscores the ethos of the film.

Lucas argues that *The Man From Snowy River* 'provides a transparent account of the production of dominant masculinity within Australian/Western culture' in which 'the idealised male subject is one who learns from his father, and thereby inherits a mantle of knowledge and strength from him' (1998, p. 140). However, Jim Craig's passage from boyhood to manhood comes through a series of challenges to the preconceptions of not only his own father, who dies early on in the film, and the dominant males of the 'high country', but also of Harrison, who functions as surrogate father-figure for Jim to oppose until his final conversion to future father-in-law. More significantly, all of Jim's tests and challenges along his hero's journey to a fully-fledged manhood deserving of his father's legacy and the sanctioned union with Harrison's daughter Jessica, centre upon his knowledge of, and skills with, horses. While Lucas acknowledges representational inflections that may serve to gender a landscape, the focus of her detailed textual analysis does not go beyond 'enactments of masculinity' (1998, p. 139) as realised through human, and predominantly male, interactions.

David Carter, in his article *Crocs in Frocks: Landscape and Nation in the 1990s*, charts general 'shifts in the rhetoric of landscape' (Carter, 1996, p. 89) through selected Australian cultural representations, including film, from that decade. Carter summarises the thrust of his discourse thus:

Despite the persistence of the bush myth my argument is to point to other relationships between land and nation which have emerged over the last decade and which in many respects have left the old bush mythery [sic] a long way behind. (Carter, 1996, p. 90)

Taking his examples from the ‘public rhetorics’ (Carter, 1996, p. 89) surrounding Australia’s Bicentenary in 1988, Carter identifies a trend in the representation of the ideology of Australian nationhood and identity: the movement away from depictions of landscape as resources of ‘*pastoral* economy of money and meaning [original emphasis]’ towards the unpopulated ‘wilderness and desert’, the ‘red centre’ or the ‘wide brown’ landscape (1996, p.90).

Carter’s approach does indeed lead to the recognition or reconsideration of elements and phases in the representation of masculinity beyond a simplistic acknowledgement of the bush as a mythic arena of Australian male endeavor and accomplishment, as the discussion of *Crocodile Dundee* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* later in this chapter will show. However, despite his focus on landscape, Carter’s reading of *The Man From Snowy River* remains skewed towards the human representations: the subtleties and complexities of the animal representations are overlooked. Consequently, his analysis fails to identify the film as exhibiting some of the earliest examples of the very same developments in the relationship between depictions of landscape and national identity that inform his thesis. In line with currently dominant interpretations, as exemplified by Lucas and McFarlane and Mayer, Carter categorises *The Man From Snowy River* as a film exemplifying the ethos of 1970s and early 1980s Australian cinema, identified by Gibson, in which landscape is employed to promote a homogenous characterisation of national identity (Gibson, 1992, p. 68). Subsequently, Carter identifies the film’s ‘telling myth of *unique fitted-ness* [original emphasis] to the land’ as

emanating from 'rural nostalgia or urban commodification' (1996, p.89. Original emphasis).

All these commentaries appear to disregard Graeme Turner's analysis of *The Man From Snowy River* in *National Fictions* (most puzzling in Carter's case, perhaps, as he himself is quoted on the back cover of the second impression, commending the work as 'a ground-clearing book ... it should become a seminal work ...'). Yet Turner's commentary clearly points to the importance of an animal-centred reading in uncovering the full meaning of the text. Of the hero, Jim Craig, he says:

His acceptance of the challenge that the landscape presents differentiates him from the squatters in the valley below, while his affinity with the bush horses invests his quest with hope by connecting him with the film's strongest metaphor for the spirit of the land. (1989, p. 118)

As Turner goes on to note, Jim's relationship with horses also functions as a metaphor for the ideology of the Australian nationalist discourse:

[Jim's] respect for the 'colt from Old Regret' is the clearest example of his harmony with the Australian version of nature, and it is important that he trains the horse by 'gentling it' rather than by dominating it.

This is the thematic substance of the film and it is central to the nationalist myth and the ideology of the invented Australia; ours is not, like the American, a myth of the imposition of the individual on the land – of the politics of conquest; ours is a myth of accommodation and acceptance which admits the impossibility of conquering land and merely recommends a manner of survival by learning to live in partnership with it. (1989, p. 118)

Further to Turner's argument, the representation of Jim's relationship with nature illustrates a development in the ideology of the myth of white Australian identity. This can be exemplified by comparing *The Man From Snowy River* with Charles Chauvel's classic epic, *Sons of Matthew* (1949). Both films centre manifestly nationalistic themes around settlement narratives; both films exalt the landscape with compelling cinematography and both films link the hero's romanticism of the land with his love for a woman. The 'taming' motif of *Sons of Matthew* is echoed by one of 'gentling' in *The Man From Snowy River*.

In *Sons of Matthew*, Shane O'Riordan's romantic interest, Cathy, is both implicitly and explicitly compared with the land (Molloy, 1990a, p. 122). Independent and resolute, Cathy personifies the wilderness Shane intends to claim. Shane describes the land as 'like a beautiful woman - lovely to look at but tough to handle'; and land and woman are directly equated in his declaration of love: 'You and the earth, Cathy - that's all I want'. Early on in the film, however, before the land/woman simile is directly expressed in the final act, the connection between Shane's passion for – and attitude towards – the land and Cathy is strongly alluded to through the dialogue. In the role of Shane, Michael Pate's 'lusty' and 'full-blooded' (*Kine Weekly*, 26th January 1950 cited in Pike & Cooper, 1998, p. 209) delivery signals the theme. He is ostensibly speaking of the unexplored territory of the Lamington Plateau when he comments: 'There's something good about cutting into a place where no man's been before' - but the allusion to the virginal Cathy is plain. The high-spirited, fence-jumping Cathy 'needs putting over someone's knee'; the wilderness needs to be subdued and controlled. 'Great land Cathy, if only we could tame

it,' says Shane: 'I think that's what you like most about it - the taming,' is Cathy's reply. In contrast, in *The Man From Snowy River*, when asked to comment on the viability of Harrison's scheme to 'tame the high country' with a system of railroads, Jim observes: 'You might sooner hold back the tide than tame the mountains'. Regarding the landscape, he says, 'You've got to treat the mountains like a high spirited horse – never take them for granted'; while Jessica responds, 'It's the same with people too'.

The taming in *Sons of Matthew* is closer to 'the myth of the imposition of the individual on the land' and the 'politics of conquest' (Turner, 1989, p. 118) which Turner identifies with the American nationalist discourse. The depiction of Jim's 'gentling' relationship with horses and women in *The Man From Snowy River* illustrates a development in the representation of the ideology of the myth of white Australian identity away from tropes of domination towards tropes of partnership and accommodation. The parallels drawn in both films between nature and women highlight this difference in attitude. If it were not for the thematic transposition of land *and* women in *Sons of Matthew*, it could be argued that this more impositional taming ethic necessarily arises from distinctions to be made between clearing land and working with animals.

As a logical development of precedent discourses on Australian human/landscape relationships, consideration of the human/animal relationships in *The Man From Snowy River* foreground representations beyond the conventional ones traditionally identified with the film. Furthermore, close analysis of not only the relationships between the main characters and the horses, but also the representation of the horses themselves, highlights

a fresh motif at the heart of the film's discourse: the dichotomy of tame versus wild, or more specifically, domesticated versus feral. The recognition and exploration of these dualities provides concrete examples of representations to illustrate the suitability to life on the land that Carter has identified. Moreover, these representations point to a previously unacknowledged development in the cinematic articulation of national identity through masculinity and landscape which places *The Man From Snowy River* beyond the conventional or reactionary.

The film opens with a single, static, long take of a horizon at dusk. Monochromatic cinematography simplifies the mise-en-scène to the point of abstraction. The scene remains ambiguous for several beats until the perspective of the distance of framing is made intelligible by the simultaneously sudden sound and sight of horses galloping through the shot. Passing on the horizontal axis from left to right, they are framed in medium close-up, with only the legs in view. They pass briefly, in a couple of beats. Sound and movement cease as suddenly and simultaneously as they appeared. The crepuscular horizon remains: unchanged, no longer ambiguous and therefore now more poignantly silent. The shot continues, again for many beats longer than the duration of the action, and then gradually dissolves into a long shot of the Craig wood cabin set within the context of the Snowy Mountain landscape (*Appendix: excerpt LXII*).

This brief sequence can be read as establishing the motif of the film. The image of the horizon is of primordial simplicity: a universal landscape, both geographically and temporally. The abstraction of the representation invites broader existential questions - if

not anxieties - than those particular to national identity. The portrayal of the horses brings ambiguity to the fore, inviting questions of *their* identity and purpose: they could be wild or tame, being driven into a holding-pen or escaping from one. But within the polysemy of the sequence – before any human characters have been introduced - it is strongly indicated that the horses function not only as ‘the film’s strongest metaphor’ as Turner notes (1989, p. 118), but more specifically, as the adversaries in a hero’s challenge.

Both Proppian and Straussian forms of analysis are particularly apt in the consideration of *The Man From Snowy River*. As structuralist theories, both define characters by ‘what they do’ rather than ‘what they are’ (Barthes, 1977, p.106), and consequently, their application serves to highlight the articulations of practical activity previously identified as key representations in the expression of Australian male identity. The narrative form of the film can be read as following that of the classic heroic tale or myth and as such it fits well into the formula of basic units of action as delineated by Propp in his analyses of folktales in *The Morphology of the Folktale* (1968/1928). Fredric Jameson, in *The Prison-House of Language* provides a useful summary of Propp’s formula:

The basic tale begins with either injury to a victim, or the lack of some important object. Thus, at the very beginning, the end result is given: it will consist in the retribution for the injury or the acquisition of the thing lacked ...

[The hero] meets a donor (a toad, a hag, a bearded old man, etc.), who after testing him for the appropriate reaction (for some courtesy, for instance) supplies him with a magical agent (ring, horse, cloak, lion) which enables him to pass victoriously through his ordeal.

Then [the hero] meets the villain, engaging him in the decisive combat. Yet, paradoxically enough, this episode, which would be the central one, is not irreplaceable. There is

an alternative track, in which the hero finds himself before a series of tasks or labours which, with the help of his agent, he is ultimately able to solve properly ...

The latter part of the tale is little more than a series of retarding devices: the pursuit of the hero on his way home, the possible intrusion of a false hero, the unmasking of the latter, with the ultimate transfiguration, marriage and/or coronation of the hero himself. (1972, pp. 65-6)

The narrative of *The Man From Snowy River* fits comfortably within the framework suggested by these roles and functions. The story begins with an injury resulting in the death of Jim Craig's (the hero) father in an accident caused by the 'colt from Old Regret'. A woman's love is also lacking, as we learn that Jim's mother died three years before. While the initial motivation for Jim's ensuing quest is ostensibly to prove his manhood and so earn the right to a living in the high country, in doing so he also achieves retribution for his father's death by capturing the colt from Old Regret and acquires a woman's love in the romantic dénouement of his relationship with Jessica. Jessica's uncle, Spur, functions as 'the donor' by giving Jim 'the magical agent', his mountain horse, 'which enables him to pass victoriously through his ordeal' (Jameson, 1977, p. 65). Without a horse, Jim would not have been able to get a job with Harrison or save the imperilled Jessica, but it is only with the specific ('magical') skills of a mountain horse that Jim is able to keep up with the brumby herd when all others have been defeated, thereby effecting his heroic victory.

While a Proppian perspective brings the narrative's basic units of action to the fore, Straussian analysis serves to flesh out the ostensible linear structure by uncovering a

deeper underlying paradigmatic pattern of organisation or latent content (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 482; 1958, p. 18; 1964, p. 313). Lévi-Strauss's hypothetical paradigmatic matrix is based upon an a priori binary principle of polar oppositions related to culture such as life/death, male/female, raw/cooked etc ... through which meanings are negotiated towards resolution (1972, pp. 203-204). Subsequently, the structure of myths can be viewed as a type of language consisting of codes or 'mythemes' resulting from deconstructing a narrative into 'the shortest possible sentences' (Lévi-Strauss, 1972, p. 211). As codes, these mythemes may be analysed according to a structure or grammar analogous to that of linguistic models.

A 'functional semiotic approach' (O'Leary, 2003, p. 197) integrates well with critical disciplines which adopt a structuralist methodology, focusing on semiotic narratology or the 'grammar of the plot' such as those developed by Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss (Propp, 1968/1928; Lévi-Strauss, 1972). Given that the narrative form of *The Man From Snowy River* closely follows that of the classic heroic tale, a syntagmatic analysis of spatial relationships based on a structural linguistic approach to film studies is useful here in order to highlight the functions of the horses within the narrative. Notwithstanding acknowledgement of Christian Metz's earlier theory of syntagmatic categories for narrative film (Metz, 1974, Chapter 5), which he later abandoned, the following syntagmatic analysis of selected shots and sequences from *The Man From Snowy River* exemplifies the works of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By* (1980), and Theo van Leeuwen, in both his chapter *Moving English: The Visual Language of Film* (in *Redesigning English: New Texts, New Identities*, 1996), and

his book, written with Gunther Kress: *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (1996). Brian O'Leary's article *Camera Movements in Hollywood's Western Genre: A Functional Semiotic Approach* (2003, pp. 197 - 217), is also an important source. Drawing upon the seminal works of both Michael Halliday (1994) and Michel Colin (1985), O'Leary re-evaluates and develops this structural linguistic approach to film studies and illustrates the way in which visual semiotics can be beneficially applied to practical film criticism.

Fundamentally, spatial syntagmatic relations include: above/below, in front/behind, close/distant, left/right, north/south/east/west, and inside/outside or centre/periphery. These structural relationships function as 'orientational metaphors'; any understanding or 'reading' of their meaning is linked to key cultural concepts, and therefore never semantically neutral (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Consequently, Western readings of film texts are generally organised according to the schemata suggested by languages that are read and written along a horizontal axis from left to right. As O'Leary notes:

The most important visual organizing principle that comes from linguistics is the vectorialization of narratives according to a left-to-right reading. (2003, p. 198)

For example, Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen relate sequential significance in the left-hand and right-hand elements of a visual image to a sense of 'before' and 'after' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen, 1996) and, expanding upon Halliday's linguistics (1994), to 'the already given' and 'the new' (Kress & van Leeuwen 1996,

pp.186-192). The left-hand side signifies 'the already given'; something familiar, self-evident or agreed upon. The right-hand side signifies 'the new'; something unfamiliar or surprising. Developing this concept further, Kress and van Leeuwen postulate that 'right-handed' elements of a visual image signal the potentially problematic or contestable (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, pp.186-192).

Such a functional semiotic approach to textual analysis is particularly relevant to the classic heroic tale as it relates directly to the action within the three types of narrative syntagmatic relations, or syntagrams, identified by Propp: departures and arrivals; tasks and struggles and the establishment or breaking of contracts (Greimas, 1987; Culler 1975, p. 213; Hawkes, 1977, p. 94). This approach is also apt when considering the representation of men through their practical activity, as syntagramatic analysis highlights vectors of action, which once identified, can be accorded due significance.

Returning to the opening sequence of *The Man From Snowy River*, it can be read as signaling the nature of the hero's adversaries, their progression or regression, and by implication, the corresponding trajectory of the hero's up-coming quest. The opening shot of the horses' legs moving left to right horizontally across the screen communicates both the certitude of the animals' 'already given' entitled existence within the environment and foreshadows the unfamiliar or surprising ordeals that the hero will have to undergo.

The theme of tame versus feral is introduced in the next sequence. As Jim and his father, Harry, sit down to a meal in their wood cabin, they are interrupted by the sound of Jim's horse, Bess, in distress. The value of horses has already been a topic of conversation, and Jim's immediate reaction confirms not only the value of the horse to their livelihood, but also the nature of his relationship with the animal. His affection is clear as he attempts to quieten her verbally, addressing her as 'Bessie'. As Jim gently goes to take hold of her harness, she rears up, wild-eyed at his touch. Both the gesture and the cinematography here prefigure representations of Jim's future adversary: 'the colt from Old Regret'. Bess is framed on the left with Jim on the right. The composition underscores the inevitability of the outcome for the horse having heard the 'call from the wild' while pointing to the uncertainty of Jim's immediate future. As the fragility of 'tameness' is exposed, the power and importance of the untamed is articulated through the use of low-angles and close-ups.

The sequence in the stable is intercut with representations of the brumbies. As in the opening shot, they appear as silhouettes against a twilight background, stampeding left to right, with a medium shot introducing the herd, followed by medium close-shots focusing on the horses' heads and then the legs again. Though less abstracted and ambiguous than in the initial representation, these images retain the sense of an impending, unstoppable force. After Jim identifies the re-appearance of 'the old thoroughbred's mob' as the cause of the upset, the cut-aways introduce him to his soon-to-be adversary, the now matured 'colt from Old Regret'. A following pan moves across the screen from left to right as a lone stallion is seen re-joining his herd. As before, the vector of the action signifies both

permanence and progress, and the shot serves as a visual confirmation of Jim's realisation. Harry takes up a rifle and threatens to shoot the stallion. The stallion is revealed and individualised in the proceeding intercut. Centrally framed in long shot, the rearing figure, again facing left, delineates confident defiance. Jim intercepts his father and the corresponding image places the herd in context for the first time. Framed in extreme long shot, cantering calmly along a mountain outline as if aware of their reprieve, the herd is portrayed as integral to the landscape. However, the defiant stallion reappears once Jim articulates his plan to catch, break and tame them. As if in answer to Jim's confident assertion of 'who better than a mountain man to catch them', the herd are once more abstracted in mid shot as they appear to flee from the challenge, regressing from right to left. The final intercut underlines the all consuming inevitability of the future interaction of Jim with the horses, by zooming-in on the stallion until his blackness fills the screen (*Appendix: excerpt LXIII*).

On one level, these intercuts can be seen to function as visual responses to the action in the main sequence. As such, they introduce and confirm the importance of the stallion's role within the narrative and establish the 'dialogue' between the human and animal protagonists. A close analysis of the editing techniques employed throughout the sequence as a whole, however, manifests a more subtle - yet more crucial - function to the thematic essence of the film. The use of intercuts here goes against the conventions of 'invisible editing' or the 'continuity system' - the mode in which the vast majority of realist narrative feature films have been edited, following the Hollywood model, since the 1920s (Bordwell & Thompson, 2001, p. 405).

Broadly speaking, the codes of invisible editing prescribe techniques that are grounded not only in motivation, but also effect a visual ‘seamlessness’, enabling a conviction of realism. As illustrated above, motivation for the intercuts soon becomes apparent; increasingly so as the sequence unfolds. But while the cuts are clearly motivated, they are jump cuts rather than matched cuts. No ‘realistic’ visual relationship between the parallel activities is ever established: sound is the only bridging device. Midway through the sequence, once the threat has been identified, Jim and Harry look out of the frame, towards the left, but this merely *suggests* a realistic point of view as no such point of view has been, or ever is, established. No concrete viewpoint - such as a doorway or window-frame - is portrayed in an establishing shot or through camera movement. This technique serves to destabilise the subjective viewpoint most usually associated with the realist style, while the use of intercuts simultaneously maintains the visual logic of parallel development through which two distinct but related events are understood to be happening at the same time. The realism of the subjective viewpoint is subverted further by the varying shot lengths of the intercuts: we cannot be seeing the horses through Jim or Harry’s eyes.

While jump cuts are used for dramatic effect in realist narrative feature films, such a long sequence is most unusual. As O’Regan details, this departure in style from the ‘verisimilitude’ required of Australian feature films to be culturally acceptable opened the *The Man From Snowy River* to much negative criticism from professional commentators despite its commercial success, and the film was derided as being clichéd, melodramatic and stagy (O’Regan, 1982, ¶9-11). An alternate reading privileging the

human/animal dialogue in Jim's relationship with the horses, the oppositional tensions between the tame and the wild, together with the structure of the narrative as a hero's quest, highlights the mythic and universal themes of the film. Given such a focus, the editing and camerawork in the opening sequence can be read as deliberately working to liberate the action from the specifics of the plot in order to point to a second level of meaning. The monochromatic cinematography and the emphasis it places on outlines recall Palaeolithic cave paintings. Consequently, the connection can again be made to the universal through a Straussian interpretation of myths as messages from our ancestors about the human relationship with nature and animals (Lévi-Strauss, 1972). More than a film about a man and horses, *The Man From Snowy River* is also a film about the constant negotiations between the tame and wild that have shaped not only white Australian's relationship with the land, but also man's relationship with the environment in general.

The positioning and movement of the horses within the frame and the editing style work both to convey meaning through the semiotics of relationships in the conventional mode of realistic cinematographic techniques and to articulate the animals' cognitive and emotional states. This can be seen in the tree-felling sequence which ends with the death of Jim's father. They are planning to build a holding yard for the brumbies, so once more the portrayal of the wild horses functions in dialogue with the human intentions and the binary opposition of tame versus wild is emphasised as activity is answered with activity. The quality of tameness is stressed in the sequence which starts with a pan from Harry

chopping to his gelding working with Jim to haul a log. The horse's connection with the men through practical activity is established. A close-up of the horse's hooves followed by an extreme close-up of the straining chain deconstructs and objectifies the relationship. The castrated animal which, in contrast to Bessie, has not been afforded the individualisation of a name, is presented as a model of compliance. Struggling to get free at the sound of the wild herd, he dislodges the log that crushes Jim's father, but unable to unshackle himself, he breaks a leg, leaving Jim no choice but to shoot him.

Bessie, however, is able to answer the call to freedom. The rearing stallion now faces to the right, signaling imminent danger. Galloping towards the camera, just left of centre, the brumbie herd symbolise confrontation. Bessie's reaction, and indeed her emotional state, is conveyed through a facial close-up and a low-angled shot, exaggerating the action as her hooves move through the air. As Bessie escapes with the herd, Jim is framed to the extreme right, standing powerless in the face of this wild force. As Jim's father lays dying, the horses are further abstracted into a blur of legs as they pass before him in. The final image of the horses shows them cantering off into the forest, distanced by the foregrounding trees. The composition of the shot suggests bars or barriers, but ones of protection rather than imprisonment, as the brumbies meld back into their environment, safe once again from human interference (*Appendix: compilation LXIV*).

The representation of the stallion leading-up to the trampling of Jim is rather more problematic. The wild herd's reappearance is foreshadowed with a low-angled insert of the stallion rearing on a ridge under a full moon. The use of clichéd horror film symbolism at this point momentarily shifts the portrayal away from that of potentially

credible anthropomorphism to one of melodramatic hyperbole. Similarly, when Jim has fallen in front of the stallion, the use of rapid zoom shots and a freeze-frame montage fail to create the necessary tension. The incongruity of this sudden change in style has a comic effect, and the humour engendered works adversely to dispel all suspense. (*Appendix: compilation LXV.*).

The chase sequences of the climax, as Harrison and his men, and finally, Jim alone, attempt to round-up the wild horses, are the most effective of the film. The fast-paced editing, the wide-ranging variety of angles, shots, composition and vectors of action, together with the mix of terrains and environmental features informing the *mise-en-scène*, result in sequences that both create and maintain excitement throughout. Jim's ultimate triumph over the stallion and his herd, and over Harrison and his men, is seen to come through the combination of skills and knowledge. His skill as a horseman enables him to continue riding and controlling his horse, at one point even without a bridle. His knowledge of the area enables him to gain ground through short-cuts, and his understanding of mountain horses gives him the confidence to follow the brumbies down the mountainside.

The techniques employed in the portrayal of the iconic ride down the mountainside serve to shift the representation away from realism towards a more mannered, mythic mode of depiction. The shocking effect of the right-to-left, top-to-bottom diagonal of the action is further accentuated by low-angled framing. The exaggeration confers heroic status upon Jim and his horse as they appear to break free of earthly constraints, taking flight over the viewer into their mythic destiny. The use of slow motion adds an element of romanticism,

again indicating a departure into the extraordinary, while the exoticism of a snow-filled *mise-en-scène* add a lyrical inflection to the sequence in which Jim catches up with the brumbies and begins to assert control (*Appendix: excerpt LXVI*).

As the adversaries face each other, the notion of human/animal dialogue is articulated once more, but now the eye-level point-of-view shots used suggest the two are meeting as well-matched equals. Jim demonstrates the power of the consolidation of his mountain-man knowledge and skills by herding the horses back down to Harrison's station with nothing more than a few well-timed cracks of his whip. The leitmotif of 'gentling' as opposed to domination or coercion falters at this late stage in the film. Jessica responds to Jim's whip-cracking by casting her eyes to the ground and stepping down off the fence in a gesture of pure submission. And as Jim tells Harrison that he will be back for his brood mares 'and whatever else is mine' the allusion to Jessica is clear, and one cannot but agree with Lucas that this 'stereotypical equation of women with ... horse[s] to be ridden' or used as breeding stock is indeed 'objectionable' (Lucas, 1995, p. 103) (*Appendix: excerpt LXVII*).

Despite the disconcerting change of accent in the very final scenes, overall, the characteristics of masculinity in *The Man From Snowy River* are not those of 'physical violence, domination, or competition' as Lucas maintains (1998, p. 140). While these traits can be observed in the human, male to male activities and relationships, the main themes and tenets of the film are to be found within the human/animal matrix. The

Australian ‘myth of accommodation and acceptance’ (Turner, 1989, p. 118) is articulated through action, dialogue and cinematography. Aerial shots are not simply employed as celebrations of the beauty of the landscape: each one is motivated by the manifestation of a mountain-man skill or experience. They signal a positive development in Jim’s quest by symbolising the process of his ‘accommodation and acceptance’ into the very fabric of the environment. The aerial sequences following Jessica’s rescue and the submission of the brumbie herd both provide good examples (*Appendix: compilation LXVIII*).

The emphasis placed on the skills of both mountain men and mountain horses points to partnership, as Turner notes (1989, p.118), and this interdependence echoes the Australian value of mateship. The qualities of the wild are acknowledged as vital to survival in the environment. Consequently, countering Carter’s observations (1996, p. 89), the representation of the bush in *The Man From Snowy River* can be read as pointing to a development in the articulation of national belonging beyond that of a pastoral economy of solely financial meaning. The land is recognised as ultimately indomitable, an attitude far removed from that evinced in earlier Australian films such as *Sons of Matthew*, for example. Jim’s quest is to understand the nature of his relationship with both the land and the horses, as suggested at the beginning of the film. After his father’s death, the mountain men tell Jim that he must leave his land. Jim protests that he now owns the land: ‘Owning it has got nothing to do with it,’ is the reply. Thus, the landscape of *The Man From Snowy River* also functions as an example of ‘a space for “the laconic ‘minimalist’ hero ... communing with the spirit of the land ... [which is] habitable, but

only by a very special breed of people””(Gibson cited in Carter, 1996, p. 91): a space which Carter only identifies with later films.

The Man From Snowy River’s ranking as the most successful of Australian blockbusters fell to *Crocodile Dundee*, directed by Peter Faiman, the ‘world-wide hit’ of 1986 (O’Regan, 1988, p. 155), and both the similarities and differences between the two films are significant. In contrast to the ‘humourless and least self-reflective’ representations of masculinity in *The Man From Snowy River* (Lucas, 98, p. 140), *Crocodile Dundee* offers much more complex representations, with affectionate parody at their core. As with *The Man From Snowy River*, *Crocodile Dundee* was produced with the American film markets firmly in mind (Lucas, 1995, p. 103; O’Regan, 1988, p. 157). Consequently, the resulting inflections need to be recognised when analysing the portrayal of all aspects of outback life, including the human/animal relationships, in the film. In addition, as O’Regan argues, it is important to acknowledge the Australian audiences’ relationship with Paul Hogan as a TV comic and advertising personality before his role as Mick Dundee if the film is to be seen as other than ‘confirming impoverished cultural and social stereotypes about ... masculinity and Australians’ (O’Regan, 1988, p. 158).

Within these two matrices of meaning there are both traditional and new articulations of white Australian belonging and ‘fittedness’ to the land. The ethos of ‘gentling’ and the triumph of outback skills over brute force in the struggle for survival are themes which also inform the narrative of *Crocodile Dundee*. Unlike Jim, Mick is portrayed as already belonging to the land: he is already a ‘hero’ and a ‘legend’, albeit in a jokey, parodic

sense, and the narrative is not one of a mythic quest so much as a showing-off: a celebration and reinvention of Australian masculinity for both audiences at home and abroad. Carter identifies the inclusive effect of the film's self-knowing, self-mocking comedic tone on Australian audiences as that of 'sharing a secret':

The film works hard at achieving the casual air of Dundee's belonging, not least in its knowing winks to its Australian audiences – those who know, unlike the Yanks, just how seriously to take Mick Dundee (not very) and just how seriously to take the landscape (very but in an unstated, understated way). (1996, p. 91)

The subversive intent of the film is firmly established once Sue Charlton, the American journalist willing to pay \$2500 to 'see where [Mick] was attacked and how he survived' the crocodile, arrives in Walkabout Creek. As she waits for Mick with his 'manager', Wally, he assures her that Dundee is very different from the other rough and tumble characters populating the bar. He describes Dundee as 'very reserved', suggesting he is a local 'legend' for this very reason, and that 'he was out doing a quiet spot of fishing' when the crocodile attacked. As Wally recounts the severity of Dundee's injuries; how any other man would have 'turned-up his toes' and died; how Mick crawled on his hands and knees through hundred of miles of snake-infested swampland, the barmaid interjects with the reality of the situation: how he crawled past the hospital into the nearest bar. This sequence introduces the dynamics of the representations within the film; the image of the mythic Australian bushman is offered for foreign consumption, only to be deflated through local perspective or self parody. These dynamics, and their comic effect, are visually expressed in the following sequence as Dundee enters the bar seemingly

wrestling a crocodile. With one arm around the ostensibly subdued animal, Dundee then saunters over to the bar, orders himself a beer, and indicating the crocodile, one for his 'mate' too. Sue is suitably alarmed until she is told that the crocodile is stuffed (*Appendix: excerpt LXIX*).

The comic mode of *Crocodile Dundee* allows the theme of human/animal mateship to be much more overtly expressed than in *The Man From Snowy River*. Mick's dialogue anthropomorphises all animals, dangerous or not; a buffalo is 'dopey', a crocodile can be 'talked-out of' initiating a death-roll, and a crocodile bite is 'more of a love-bite really'. Consequently, the awkward cinematographic anthropomorphisations of *The Man From Snowy River* are avoided. Moreover, Dundee is portrayed as identifying with the animals, even when his own life, or that of another human, is in danger. After her close encounter with a crocodile, Sue exclaims: 'That croc was going to eat me alive!'; 'I wouldn't hold that against him,' Dundee replies, 'the same thought crossed my mind once or twice'. The editing and camera angles employed before the attack sequence underline this human/animal equivalence. As Sue bathes, she is framed from a low-angled point-of-view through the reeds. This voyeuristic perspective, suggesting a stalking crocodile's viewpoint, connects with that of Dundee, who is also watching from the undergrowth (*Appendix: excerpt LXX*).

The problematics of white Australian belonging to the land are only lightly alluded to in the film. While commentators such as Meaghan Morris may read this as 'structuring absence' (Morris, 1998, p. 257), the approach can be understood as one necessary not

only to the comic intent of the film, but also to its mythic timbre. Both the character of Mick Dundee and the Australian setting of the film hold mythic qualities that inform the representations. As Carter observes, this is ‘an ancient and primeval landscape that leads backwards into a *prehistoric* past....’ (1996, p. 91. Original emphasis). In delineating the progression of Australian representations of national belonging, Carter identifies *Crocodile Dundee* as clearly illustrating a transition from the (white) populated or intended-to-be populated landscape, to the true wilderness as a national signifying environment:

the representation of the landscape in *Crocodile Dundee* is remarkable for the way it repeats scarcely any of the familiar tropes of Australian landscapes, those, for example, in the period and scenery films which preceded it. (1996, p. 91)

The *mise-en-scène* of the ‘Kakadu-style wilderness’ can be read as placing the narrative within a mythic framework. The specific narrative logic of the historicity of white Australian settlement, as evidenced in *The Man From Snowy River*, is absent. Here we are presented with land as ‘mythic space, beyond [white] culture and history, always threatening to defeat meaning while promising some ultimate meaning’ (Carter, 1996, p. 90). While this landscape may be ‘known’ to Australians in a mediated sense - through exploration stories and environmental documentaries, for example - it remains as experientially unknown for the vast majority of white Australians as it does for non-Australians. The ‘timelessness’ of this landscape, innocent of markers of white progress or destiny, functions as a white mythic landscape: ‘it is as if time and place become one and uniquely “our” time and place, our history *and* our present’ (Carter, 1996, p. 91. Original emphasis).

The characterisation of Mick Dundee connotes a timeless, supra-cultural representation through various allusions. The style of Dundee's costuming is heralded before the character himself appears on screen, as a thrown bowie knife lodges itself into the bar-counter. Traditionally an American hunting knife, with links to Davy Crockett and El Alamo, the bowie knife is an iconic weapon of the American Western and adventure films of the mid 20th century. Mick himself is 'costumed' rather than clothed in a pastiche of sartorial codes referencing the hero's of 1950s American popular culture: a 'mishmash of cowboy/western, bushman/jungle' (Morris, 1988, p. 247), with an Akubra in place of a Stetson and snakeskin in place of rawhide. Visual and verbal allusions - Dundee is variously referred to as '*Davy Crockett*', '*Jungle Jim*' and '*Tarzan*' - layer upon this personification of the Australian bush mythos to effect a universalised mythic frontiersman known to both Australian and American culture. While this characterisation comprising of 'themes thought "familiar" to American audiences' (Morris, 1988, p. 248) may indeed have been developed for purely commercial reasons, the resulting 'ideal of *positive unspecificity*' (Morris, 1988, p. 147. Original emphasis) framing the representations in *Crocodile Dundee* ultimately functions to articulate the fresh representation of national belonging identified by Carter (1996, p 91).

Dundee's characterisation plays across several borders in addition to that of Australian/American cultural constructs. His non-observance of the dictates of Sue's sense of time-keeping is not attributed to a simple bush/city or American/Australian temporal disconnect, but because he was 'raised by Aboriginals'. The introduction of

Mick's friend Nev, a Pinanjarra man played by the iconic Australian Aboriginal actor David Gulpilil, underlines this blurring of perceived cultural boundaries or positive unspecificity. During the lead-up to a potential sexual interlude with Sue, Mick 'intuits' a disturbance in the undergrowth and goes to investigate. Camera angles established as portraying Sue's anxious points of view finally frame an Aboriginal face wearing ceremonial body paint. This image – set up as juxtaposing a threatening exotic 'other' to destabilise the clichéd cinematic seduction scene – is subverted within a couple of beats as Mick's bowie knife, once again employed as a visual synecdoche, appears at the Aborigine's throat, who then exclaims: 'Ah Mick ... you frightened the shit out of me!'

The subsequent scene continues with the theme of the blurring of cultural boundaries through the juxtaposition of Dundee's lifestyle with Nev's and the subversion of cultural expectations, as expressed by Sue. In contrast to Dundee, Nev is a 'real city boy': a watch-wearing urbanite not usually to be found travelling through the bush in traditional dress. When Nev tells Sue she cannot take his photograph, she assumes it is because of a cultural taboo, but the joke is that the technologically literate Nev has noticed that she has forgotten to remove her lens cap. Dundee's attempt to reimburse his friend with the initial sense of exoticism so impressive to Sue is also foiled by farce. As Dundee explains the way in which Aborigines use a telepathic sense to traverse the bush in the dark he is interrupted by the sound of Nev stumbling and exclaiming, 'Ouch ... ouch. I hate the bush'. Dundee's liminal cultural status is then confirmed as he attends the corroboree with Nev and is the only white man present. Dundee's knowledge of 'bush tucker' reinforces this representation. He knows that the 'deadly' King Brown snake is 'not bad

eating' but they always give him gas. While barbequing a goanna for Sue he encourages her to try witchetty grubs and sugar ants, but he prefers to open a can than share the roast, commenting, 'You can live on it, but it tastes like shit' (*Appendix: compilation LXXI*).

As the film's eponymous protagonist, Dundee's generalised, idealised characterisation and world view inflects the majority of the representations within the film. The animals and locations are geographically specific, but the skills Dundee employs in dealing with them are culturally and historically unspecific and thus function as mythic representations. It is this portrayal of skills beyond not only those of traditional white settlement culture and history (as in *The Man From Snowy River*, for example) but, arguably, those of any factual human/animal interaction that, in addition to the theme of human/animal mateship foregrounded by the film's mode and style, distinguish *Crocodile Dundee* as an important indicant text in the bush myth discourse.

The 'dopey buffalo' sequence is a good exemplar of the above. As the first sequence in the film in which Dundee's legendary skills are truly put to the test, it is also important in setting the tone of the whole. Coming across a buffalo confrontationally blocking the ute's progress along a track, Dundee follows his (unheeded) casual comment of, 'Get out of the way, dopey', by walking towards the animal. Dundee's hat-doffing gesture towards the buffalo at this point signals a mythic attitude of respect towards the animal. Face to face with the buffalo, Dundee's hand gestures and stroking movements – described by Wally to Sue as 'mind over matter' and an 'old bushman's trick' – seemingly hypnotise the animal into a sleeping state. Dundee then repeats the hat-doffing gesture, but towards

Sue this time as he returns to the ute, thereby underlining his equal respect for all living creatures. The hypnotism can be read as indicating the animal's co-operation in its own taming, and throughout the film Dundee is seen to work *with* animals rather than against them, unless, like the attacking crocodile, they pose an immediate threat to life or limb (*Appendix: excerpt LXXII*).

As Morris rightly notes, the crocodile is the 'most avid creature', animal or human, in this 'relatively passionless' film where 'events erupt anecdotally from the scene' and the 'aim of the action is to restore the scenic pleasure' of the location 'by a minimal gesture of self-preservation' (Morris, 1988, pp. 253-254). But while Morris interprets these gestures as reductive, diminishing the threats of the environment (Morris, 1988, pp. 253-255) to an easily manageable scale, an animal-centred reading places the emphasis on inter-species egalitarianism. Morris herself provides the key to such a reading in her analysis of Dundee's culturally liminal characterisation. She identifies Dundee's attitudes and actions as evading 'not difference, but the social *use* of difference as a weapon for humiliation, anxiety, and torment ...' (Morris, 1988, p. 256. Original emphasis.) This 'pragmatic humanism' (Morris, 1988, p. 256) extends to Dundee's interactions with the animals. In O'Regan's words:

Australian audiences are provided with the opportunity to see in Mick's qualities, Mick's performance, the enactment of something of a national quality (be it Australian egalitarianism, sense of humour, or convivial good blokeness). (1988, p. 167)

Mick's relationship with the animal he is named for is ambiguous. The question of Mick being a crocodile hunter is addressed early on in the film in the Walkabout Creek Hotel bar scene, both before and after his on-screen introduction. As he recounts the tale of the crocodile attack to Sue, Wally makes a point of noting that Dundee was doing 'a quiet spot of fishing' at the time. When a member of a group of 'city cowboys', in town for some recreational hunting, asks Dundee 'Where can a man shoot a few crocs around here?', his smiling reply is a curt: 'How would I know, shit for brains?'. When the man continues with, 'C'mon, Dundee, everyman man and his dog in the joint knows you're nothing but a bloody croc poacher', Dundee replies by throwing a punch, excusing his behaviour to Sue as he resumes dancing with her as an intolerance for bad language used in front of a lady. This is the only point in the film in which Dundee is seen to react with physical violence, for as Morris notes, the action in *Crocodile Dundee* 'is generally defined by a "masculine" refusal of overkill, hyperbole, and hysteria as principles of action' (1988, p. 252).

Dundee again denies crocodile hunting as he shows Sue the remains of his boat at the site of the attack. 'And you were hunting crocodiles in *that*?' asks Sue: 'No, it's illegal. Just fishing,' he replies. When Sue confronts him with a handful of spent cartridges from the boat that suggest otherwise, he explains them away with the observation that 'Barramundi are bloody big fish'. This equivocal treatment of the issue can of course be understood as necessary to the integrity of Dundee's characterisation as a man who respects the right of all creatures to roam the earth in the peace. The suggestion that Dundee shot the crocodile, rather than cutting its throat whilst in the throes of the attack

as he maintains, also adds an element of suspense to the scene in which Sue is attacked. As Dundee swiftly executes the crocodile with an expertly placed plunge of his knife, some part of the catharsis which follows results from the confirmation of his purported skills along with the relief of Sue's salvation. Together with the clinch that follows, this is indeed the most passionate sequence in the film. As if momentarily imbued with the freshly dead crocodile's fervour, Mick and Sue's embrace here conveys a level of ardour never again attained, even at the point of romantic resolution at the end of the film. It is the momentary lack of ambivalence which gives this scene its power.

Paul Hogan's relationship with the Australian audience as 'a representative of a certain self-deprecating masculinity' (O'Regan, 1989, p. 131) on television prior to the film feeds into the ambivalent representation. The characterisation of Mick Dundee alludes to myriad past personae from Hogan's popular comic repertoire and each one fights against the generic conventions of the classic hero. As O'Regan explains:

Hogan's position has been built on him being a trickster who makes the rules of social behaviour and filmic and televisual convention explicit and in so doing punctures both the illusion [of heroism] and any Nietzschean pretensions. (1989, p. 131)

Dundee's attitude towards the crocodile certainly differs from that of the classic hero and his adversary, as depicted in *The Man From Snowy River* for example, but it can be seen to fit within the codes and conventions of the superhero. Dundee has a colourful name and a distinctive costume, and is noted for a 'legendary' act of courage, like the classic superhero of comic-strips and animated cartoons. His self-effacing attitude towards his

victories and strengths is also reminiscent of the superhero convention in which the mortal incarnation feigns disinterest in his alter-ego's exploits.

Like the film, Dundee's nickname works on two levels: as a parodic in-joke for those in-the-know and as an awe-inspiring title for those who are not. Marketing considerations alone would have suggested that the protagonist should be named for the most actively dangerous animal portrayed. Human attitudes towards various animal species vary and, not surprisingly, research indicates Western sentiments to be ambiguous towards crocodiles, a mix of fascination and repulsion (Shackley, 1996). The tension resulting from these ambiguous feelings echoes the tension surrounding the ambiguity of the characterisation of Mick Dundee. Respected as 'survivors from the period of the dinosaurs' (Ryan & Harvey, 2000, p. 426), the crocodile also fits well into the film's prehistoric, primeval conception of the landscape. Given the above, the choice of the crocodile as titular animal makes more dramatic sense than, for example, that of the kindly regarded buffalo (Driscoll, 1995).

But the choice of the crocodile and the mode of its representation in the film can be seen to resonate beyond such pragmatism. Despite public perceptions that crocodiles are unintelligent, unfriendly, and lacking in playfulness and curiosity (Ryan & Harvey, 2000, p. 426), and therefore unattractive enough as a species to ensure minimal misplacement of audience sympathies within the narrative, the film works hard at establishing the animal as a worthy adversary deserving of treatment other than that of the 'genial overcoming' (Morris, 1988, p. 255) with which Mick approaches all other threats. In

retelling the story of his attack to Sue at the site of his abandoned fishing boat, in addition to emphasizing the animal's size ('16, 18 foot') and ferocity ('You can see where he sunk his teeth in'), Mick's description of a death-roll paints the species as excessively voracious and premeditative:

A croc will grab you, take you down to the bottom of
the water and roll you over and over and over until
you stop kicking. He's take you away to his meat
safe somewhere ... a rock ledge, bolder, down under
the water ... jam you under it, tenderise you a bit ...
good eating.

The unsettling function of the monologue is underlined by the accompanying non-diegetic soundtrack of bass strings signalling foreboding in classic horror-genre style. The emphasis placed on the crocodile as not simply deadly, like the King Brown snake, but also as a creature which employs its powers to torment and humiliate, can be read as a justification of its location outside of Mick's regular philosophical matrix (*Appendix: excerpt LXXIII*).

Torment and humiliation also figure in the kangaroo-hunting sequence: Dundee's ruse ends the kangaroo's torment with the hunters' humiliation. The set-up of the action ensures that the integrity of Dundee's Australian bush-machismo remains intact. He may have a live-and-let-live attitude towards most living creatures, but his sensibilities do not extend to the protection of kangaroos. Even though he recognises the 'dangerous bastards' shooting from the careering ute as 'those city cowboys' from the earlier fight at the Walkabout Creek Hotel bar, unlike Sue, Dundee sees no reason to intervene: 'What are you going to do?' she asks; 'Nothing, why?' Dundee replies. 'Why?' retorts Sue in

exasperation, 'They're shooting those poor kangaroos for *fun!*'. 'No law against that' is Dundee's matter-of-fact response, mirror-imaging his crocodile-hunting dissembling. A sustained look from Sue, answered by a wry expression from Dundee, indicates chivalry alone to be his motivation to action. This impetus is confirmed by Dundee's instructions to Sue as he orders her to 'keep your head down' and 'stay here', in the classic mode of the hero to the damsel-in-distress, before moving into action. By firing back at the hunters in the guise of a kangaroo, Dundee also ensures that the confrontation remains ostensibly between the kangaroo species – for the battle is already over for the dead kangaroo he uses as a prop – and its predators. Here, the hunters are indeed thwarted and humiliated by the social use of difference as it is their own ignorance and lack of experience which allows them to perceive the unnaturally posed kangaroo as viable game ('Look at this big cheeky bugger!'), yet Dundee's contrivance allows him to evade overt responsibility through considerable political guile. Both Dundee's and Sue's concluding reactions at the end of the kangaroo-hunting sequence underline these relational dynamics: Mick's 'Well done, Skippy!' gives the credit to a fictional animal character¹ and Sue's cheer acknowledges the necessity of the fantastical dimensions of her own role as catalyst (*Appendix: excerpt LXXIV*).

Once the action moves to New York, Dundee's good-humoured style of conquest effortlessly translates to the threats of the city, which naturally enough, are predominantly human rather than animal in origin. The one exception involves two Rottweiler guard

¹ The marsupial hero of the popular Australian children's television series *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo*, produced from 1966 to 1968, but aired in syndication between 1969 and 1972 in the United States and in many other countries.

dogs at Sue's father's palatial 'week-end house'. In singling out Dundee as the focus of their hostility, when he arrives with other guests for Sue's 'welcome home' party, the dogs' reaction symbolises the 'fish out of water' theme that drives the humour of this section of the film. Dundee subdues the dogs with the same hypnotic technique he used earlier on the buffalo, thereby establishing the universal quality of his mythic animal skills. This sequence is also significant to the development of the Sue/Mick romantic plotline and this can be seen in the quality of Sue's response to the action. Sue has responded affectionately to all of Dundee's societal *coups de naïveté* in the New York segment of the film - they even kiss after the 'You call that a knife? *This* is a knife' foiled-mugging scene – but her expression at this point speaks of a new proprietary pride. The redeployment of the 'buffalo technique' serves as a direct, physical reminder of their time together in Australia. There have been previous reminders, but these have been verbal and prompted by Sue: the hot-dog stand sequence for example, in which Sue's comment on New York fast food echoes Dundee's earlier take on barbequed goanna; 'You can live on it, but it tastes like shit' (*Appendix: excerpt LXXV*).

More specifically, the Rottweilers can be read as representing the two most powerful men in Sue's life: her soon-to-be fiancé and colleague, Richard, and her father and boss, Sam. The subjugation of the dogs symbolises Dundee's potential to conquer even these eminently influential figures. The honesty of Sue's wordless response, divested for the first time of any references to clichéd heroism, suggests her understanding of this symbolism and indicates her realisation of the true scope of Dundee's abilities. Unwittingly, Mick has shown himself to be capable of countering the polite but very firm

social constraints of Sue's existence and it is at this point that Sue recognises the possibility of her own freedom through a relationship with Dundee. Here, the social burden of difference most personal to Dundee himself is *overcome*, rather than evaded, through another's perception of his character gleaned via his animal skills. Within this framework, the role of the dogs can be understood to be of greater significance than that afforded to it by Morris and other commentators, who dismiss the dogs as amiable 'others' placed conveniently within the narrative for the sole purpose of showcasing Dundee's charms (Morris, 1988, p. 257).

The sense of danger, enormity or the sublime in relation to the Australian landscape noted as absent in the film as a whole (Lucas, 1998; Morris, 1988; O'Regan, 1988, 1989) can indeed be found, albeit at some remove, in the animal representations, both pictorial and verbal, in two of the New York sequences. The sublime qualities of partially known landscapes in general, rather than the Australian landscape in particular, are addressed in the first instance. The décor of the restaurant where Sue and her boyfriend Richard dine with Dundee on his first night in the city features parlour palms and large close-up images of parrots and toucans. The brightly rendered birds are tightly framed on the canvas, devoid of any specific contextual flora or landscape beyond a leafless branch and featureless sky. Coming into shot as the trio sit down at their table directly after Richard's quip, 'This'll be quite a novelty for you, Mick – eating something without killing it first', the images hang in the background as visual commentary on the dissociation of city life from the realities of nature. This signification is affirmed by the camerawork in the scene. Both Sue and Dundee are framed with the foliage of the table arrangement directly in

front of them. As they recall their time together, this aspect of the *mise-en-scène* works as a visual echo of their experiences in the outback, suggesting both their compatibility and Richard's exclusion. Sitting between the two, his white blazer in stark contrast with Dundee's snakeskin jacket, Richard's role as mouthpiece for the sneering urbanite unable to find value in such an a different lifestyle is underscored by the sterility of his foregrounding props: empty wineglasses and a menu with a picture of a toucan on the front (*Appendix: excerpt LXXVI*).

The juxtaposition of the visual and the verbal in the restaurant sequence gives rise to a subtle yet complex ironic statement. Playing the sophisticate and maliciously teasing Dundee that he will find no kangaroo or possum on the menu, Richard is oblivious to the animal image in his hands and its implications which work to subvert his superior stance. The restaurant serves Italian food, so outside of the modern conventions of fashionable design, the abstracted rainforest flora and fauna motifs of the décor are as ridiculously inappropriate as the idea of Dundee ordering bush tucker. There is no toucan on the menu either, but Richard's narrow worldview finds no incongruity there.

In the second instance, the sense of danger and enormity implicit specifically in the Australian landscape is expressed verbally through animal-centred anecdotes. While drinking in a bar with his newfound taxi-driver mate, Dundee deviates from his characteristic articulations of nonchalant pragmatism towards the challenges of his home territory for the first and only time in the film, as he holds forth with the following monologue:

I'm not putting down your black-widow spider,
but a funnel-web can kill a man in eight seconds
just by looking at him. But the real danger down
there is the sharks. The big ones, you know?
Like *Jaws*? I caught one down there three weeks
ago ... cut it open. Know what we found inside
him? Three Filipino fishermen ... still in their
boat!

Considered within the context of the film as a whole, beyond the boundaries of bar-room bragging and 'fish-out-of-water' bravado suggested by the immediate frame of reference, this discourse foregrounds the dynamics of 'belonging' and 'not belonging' at the heart of the text. As a characterisation of a supposed *ingenerate* white Australian identity - regardless of the wide-ranging ideological problematics of its possibility - Mick Dundee articulates the Gestalt of that particular viewpoint. It is fitting, therefore, that he conveys a sense of easygoing familiarity amidst his home landscape yet takes pride in recounting its wonders when he is away. The bar-room sequence shows that a sense of the sublime is not missing from the film, rather it is necessarily internalised within the characterisation of the protagonist, finding expression only in circumstances appropriate to the overriding ideology of the text (*Appendix: excerpt LXXVII*).

Some of the codes and conventions of traditional pastoral representations of the Australian landscape are transposed to the cityscape of New York. Frustrated by the crowds and traffic impeding his progress and perspective as he walks along a sidewalk, and prompted by the sight of a mounted-policeman, Dundee climbs a street-sign to survey the scene like a stockman standing on a fence to overlook his flock or herd. The

pastoral analogy is more explicitly drawn in the final sequence of the film which comprises the romantic resolution. Dundee is once again hemmed-in by a crowd as he waits on a subway platform. Messages are relayed back and forth between Sue and Dundee via two men in the crowd until Dundee's declaration of love when he says: 'I'll tell her myself – I'm coming through'. Noting the seeming impossibility of this, one of the messengers replies: 'It's too crowded here; we're jammed in like sheep.' Once again, Dundee's subsequent action appears directly motivated by this cue and he climbs over the cheering crowd towards Sue as if they were sheep in a holding-pen. The manoeuvre not only suggests the skills of the stockman, but also those of the sheepdog, reprising the theme of human/animal equivalence (*Appendix: compilation LXXVIII*).

On one level these analogies function conventionally to convey Dundee's perception of the city as a locus of constraint and conformity. In the final sequence the analogy also reinforces the resolution. When Sue takes off her shoes to run barefoot to the subway the visual message implies that Sue's choice of Dundee over Richard is one of freedom over conservatism. This interpretation is underlined and confirmed by the direct verbal allusion to sheep and the symbolism of the action as Dundee clambers efficiently over heads and shoulders in the subsequent scene: Sue has recognised Dundee as a man who 'stands head and shoulders above the rest' precisely because of his unconventionality and she is ready to embrace it. On another level, both analogic instances function as impetuses for practical actions which refresh the representational ethos of Mick Dundee's characterisation.

In the New York segment of the film, the particular Australian quality of mythic settler timelessness embodied in Dundee is necessarily diluted. With the exception of the 'hypnotising of the Rottweilers', as discussed above, all his actions are replies to human social activity and as such they emphasise Dundee's imperviousness to cultural differences rather than his atavistic knowledge. Dundee's reactions to the pastoral inferences serve to re-establish his characterisation as being beyond that of the quintessential Australian: he is a *primordial* Australian. In both instances, Dundee's actions are instigated by mediating cues. When Dundee mounts the sidewalk street-sign and clammers over the subway crowd, he does so only in response to the suggestion of external influences: sighting the mounted policeman and hearing the sheep analogy. Both set-ups illustrate that while he is cognisant of the functions of the stockman's skills, and confident enough in his physicality to replicate them, they are not techniques that come as second nature to him. In contrast, all of his other reactions throughout the film are immediate and instinctive: no intervening visual or verbal cues incite his action. These motivational differences towards practical activity mark the distinction between innate inclination and prompted pragmatism and, consequently, the distinction between activities which express Dundee's inner nature and those which do not. In this way, the representational ethos of Dundee's characterisation is conserved, remaining consistent throughout the film.

The Man From Snowy River and *Crocodile Dundee* both provide straightforward examples of expressions of masculine Australian identity through the protagonists' active relationships with animals. In *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976), directed by Philippe Mora, the

animal image is also employed metaphorically. Based on the biography of the notorious Australian bushranger of the 1860s written by Margaret Carnegie, the film describes Morgan's decline into criminal psychosis in the style of an American Western tempered with social commentary. Principally, the human/animal relationships in *Mad Dog Morgan* work to critique the ideological differences separating the English colonial ruling-class from the non-English settlers. Some of these representations can be fruitfully analysed within the parameters of practical activity as discussed above. However, the particularities of 19th century colonial uses and abuses of Darwinian theory which are central to the film, are necessarily represented less directly. Berger's observation regarding the significance of the human/animal distinction within the anthropological context is relevant here:

In one sense the whole of anthropology [is] concerned with the passage from nature to culture ... animals [are] an *intercession* between man and his origin. (1980, p. 4. Original emphasis)

In *Mad Dog Morgan* the dynamics at work within the nature/culture and savage/civilized dichotomies find expression through various configurations of the animal image and the corresponding human attitudes towards them.

The film's opening credits are set against a selection of watercolours produced by Samuel Thomas Gill (1818-1880) in the 1850s (Morgan, 1966, p. 444). The sequence tells the story of continental settlement, both Aboriginal and White, and introduces the nature/culture and savage/civilized themes through the juxtaposition of the images. The

role of the animal within the chronicle is signified in the first painting which depicts a dead white man – possibly an explorer - and animals running from an unseen danger. The main subjects of the image are the animals: the human figure is barely noticeable, placed on the bottom left of the frame. Subsequent images depict Aborigines hunting, at a corroboree and fishing from canoes. Contextualised in this manner, the initial image can be understood as indicating the importance of animals at the beginning of the new nature/culture trajectory initiated by the appearance of white settlers. The remaining ten images tell directly of Aboriginal and White conflict, the introduction of cattle and sheep, the Aboriginal as station hand, ending with the discovery of gold and the Victorian gold rush contemporaneous with the beginning of the explicit narrative of the film. The progression and implicit story-line of the opening credit sequence can also be read as a mirroring of the path of Morgan's fate as he 'regresses' from prospector to bushranger, teams up with an Aborigine and lives in the bush, to his final perception of himself as an animal and the treatment of his body as a specimen (*Appendix: excerpt LXXIX*).

The theme of human/animal relationships and its connection to ideology is introduced in the conversation between Superintendent Cobham and the bird-watching Judge Barry. Coming directly after the brutal attack on the Chinese mining camp and before his first hold-up, the scene forewarns of the hegemonic attitudes that Morgan will soon encounter. Activity is here employed to convey the complexion of the Judge's outlook. Looking at a bird through his telescope, the Judge is succinctly characterised as distanced from the immediacy of his environment and, by inference, the realities of the society in which he adjudicates. This parallel is signified more overtly when the Judge sentences Morgan to

12 years hard labour for highway robbery. Displaying greater interest in the studies of birds on his desk than in the defendant or the consequences of his sentencing, the Judge's attitude towards those who stand before him in court is depicted as commensurate with his attitude towards Australian bird-life: both are objectified and diminished to curiosities and the specification of exotica. The frivolity of bird-watching is emphasised via the comparisons invited in contrasting scenes depicting the contiguous hardships of the populace. The Judge is defined by the *impracticality* of his activity: his active relationship with his surroundings shows him to be *unfitted* to the land in which he wields so much power. It is not without some irony, then, that the Judge boasts about the practicality of his actions within this scene when, in response to Cobham's flattery over the severity of his sentences, he replies: 'My goodness, Cobham. I didn't take you to be a simpleton. I give long sentences because we've got roads to build' (*Appendix: compilation LXXX*).

Cobham and Barry's polite disagreement concerning the melody of the Willy Wagtail's song at the start of the bird-watching scene is also deserving of note. Cobham challenges the verisimilitude of Barry's bird-call and then performs his own version, but the Judge dismisses it as erroneous: 'No, no. That's the lilac-crowned wren'. In this manner, the men are portrayed as engaged with their environment solely on an academic level. Their privileging of the theoretical over the practical describes the extent to which they are dissociated with the landscape. This implication is accentuated through the comparison invited by two later scenes in which Morgan's Aboriginal friend, Billy, performs his bird-calls. Both the form and function of these representations are significant. The instance of Billy's first call occurs at the end of Morgan's hold-up of Baylis, the Magistrate of

Wagga Wagga. At this point in the narrative, Morgan's criminality is still benign: having discovered the magistrate to be carrying only a few coins, he decides to leave Baylis 'no worse' than when he found him. As Baylis protests that he will pursue the matter as the pair have still broken the law despite leaving empty-handed, Billy replies spontaneously with an exuberant rendition of a kookaburra's call. Resembling human laughter, the vocalisation mocks and challenges Baylis' impotence. Billy produces the call again after arranging a midnight sortie over the border into Victoria to help Morgan to settle some 'old scores'. Directed across the valley towards the latent enemy, the purpose of the call is broadened into a universal challenge and rallying cry, echoing the universalisation of Morgan's antagonism. This purpose and function is iterated and emphasised at the end of the film, when Billy's cry leads into the end credits. Morgan's comment that he will never believe that Billy's father was white calls attention to Billy's innate virtuosity, inviting overt comparison with Cobham and Barry's earlier efforts (*Appendix: compilation LXXXI*).

The spontaneous quality of Billy's relationship with his surroundings is highlighted throughout the film, most notably in sequences showing him involved in indigenous cultural practices such as dancing and playing the didgeridoo. Separated from the main line of narrative through the use of non-diegetic indigenous music and edited to omit any indications of cause-and-effect, these montages describe unselfconscious activity motivated by some unquestioned inner necessity. Considered in contrast to the portrayals of activity exhibited by the ruling class, as exemplified by Cobham and Harry, this

representation of indigenous activity highlights the deliberation and egocentrism at the heart of the colonials' estranged existence (*Appendix: compilation LXXXII*).

Character development in *Mad Dog Morgan* signals the dual courses of Morgan's transfiguration into animality by depicting the progression of both his adversaries' attitudes towards him and his own private perceptions of himself. This human/animal aspect of the nature/culture and savage/civilised matrices is first introduced in the prison sequence, when Sergeant Smith brands Morgan's right palm with an 'M' for malefactor as he is 'tied down like a dog' so that he will never forget what he is. The selection of human and gorilla skulls featured within the *mise-en-scène* of the Prison Governor's office announces the anthropological theme and the authorities' perception of criminals, and therefore Morgan, as interpositions between the human and animal species. This visual suggestion is made concrete through dialogue as Morgan asks about the skulls and the Governor informs him that they are exhibits for a lecture to be given by Professor Halford to the prison officers on 'the relation of man to apes'. The narrative of *Mad Dog Morgan* is framed by Detective Manwaring's direct addresses to camera in which he commentates retrospectively on the story's progression in documentary style. Manwaring's address following the scene in the Governor's office is also constructed around an evolutionary – or *devolutionary* - motif: 'Ordinary criminals come and go everyday; the bushranger comes once in an age. Nature requires time to produce her titans and these monsters reappear after the lapse of years' (*Appendix: compilation LXXXIII*).

The next stage in Morgan's 'regression' is foreshadowed by Evans' observation that he 'disappears like a bloody black'. Evans' partner has shot and wounded Morgan for stealing a horse, but having tracked him successfully thus far, they are unable to find him again despite the conspicuous trail of blood. Two adjoining visual bridges follow. Both herald a narrative development: the introduction of the Aboriginal Billy and the circumstances initiating his friendship with Morgan which comprise the next segment of the film. The monochromatic panning shot of the landscape overlaid with non-diegetic didgeridoo music visually echoes Evans' verbalised observation and goes on to articulate the trackers' – and by extension, the authorities' – inability to 'see' into this environment. The second image of the bridge announces contrast via an extreme close-up shot of Morgan's blood-trail on a rock with a snake moving across it from the lower left to the upper right of the frame. This image speaks of the individual particularities which will determine the course of Morgan's destiny (*Appendix: excerpt LXXXIV*).

Symbolically, the snake functions on many levels. Analysed syntagmatically, the snake indicates progression through both its left-to-right and bottom-to-top movement. As in the 'quandong oasis' scene of *Walkabout* (discussed in chapter 2), the appearance of the snake can be read as a biblical allusion connoting the story of the Fall in reverse, thereby signalling a return to a pre-lapsarian natural world. More specifically, within the context of the film, the image signals an existential homecoming for the outlawed Morgan, presaging the – albeit short-lived – comfort and acceptance he will find in the pre-colonial values of indigenous existence. The juxtaposition of Morgan's blood with the snake is also reminiscent of Weir's use of the skink in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (discussed in

chapter 3) to prefigure the sleeping girls' reclamation by, and into, the landscape. The introduction of the image of the snake into the animal-centred discourse of *Mad Dog Morgan* also echoes Shepisi's use of indigenous reptiles and invertebrates as expressions of indignity in *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith* (discussed in Chapter 3).

In purely visual terms, the red dot of blood and the sinuous line of the snake set against the ochre of the rock connote the play of form and colour found in the aesthetics of Australian indigenous art. Overall, the snake in *Mad Dog Morgan* symbolises survival on the most basic level, as an important source of food in the bush. Coming across the dying Morgan, after delivering first aid, Billy's first act of care and compassion towards his new-found friend consists of catching and cooking a snake. As Morgan recovers his strength, Billy teaches him indigenous bush skills: how to throw a boomerang; how to aim a spear, and how to catch a snake. The mutual acceptance of, and respect for, cultural differences on which their friendship is founded finds expression in several scenarios throughout the film. When Morgan catches a snake under Billy's supervision he throws it against a tree to stun it, but rather than finish the kill in the traditionally indigenous barehanded way, he hesitates and turns to seek Billy's approval before drawing his pistol and shooting the animal dead. Implicit within this duality is the ideological leeway in which the pair's respect for each other finds room, establishing their ultimate trust and dependence upon each other. Previous scenes work to create an expectation that Billy might reprimand Morgan for deviating from the assumed tenet of his instructions. Billy's comment, 'Good - your arm is better', not only breaks that expectation but also shows the extent of his acceptance and appreciation of Morgan's own cultural skills. The pair's

continuing ability to survive in the face of odds increasingly set against them is once more indicated with a depiction of Billy hunting and gathering snakes after the shooting of Sergeant Smith (*Appendix: compilation LXXXV*).

After a reward of £200 has been posted for his capture ‘dead or alive’; references to Morgan’s animality emphasise the theme of rarity and extinction. Billy gives Morgan an animal skin - only identifiable as that of a thylacine towards the end of the film – ostensibly in gratitude for rescuing him when he was injured during the raid on Baylis’s camp. The theme is introduced more overtly through dialogue when the French photographer Roget announces to a bar full of Morgan sympathisers that he wants to ‘photograph the exotica of your colony ... your tiger-wolf [and] your wild desperadoes’ just before Morgan himself walks in. Taken by the idea of being photographed, but only on his own terms to avoid ‘traps in the area’, Morgan offers to pose in the bar with his ‘mates’ but refuses to move outside into better lighting conditions. This exchange articulates the observer/observed dichotomy of the film’s anthropological theme which places Morgan as the wild exotic creature instinctively wary of being shot and captured - in both senses of the phrase - against his will.

Morgan’s initial resistance towards Roget is as much about maintaining control of his own image and the context in which he is portrayed as his fear of being caught by the police. The dynamics of the power-play between the observer and the observed in the bar scene foreshadow Morgan’s ultimate loss of control over his portrayal at the end of the film when his photograph is posthumously taken with Wendlam, the man who delivered

the fatal shot, posing with his rifle over Morgan's body in the proud manner of a game-hunter celebrating the feat of his kill. Roget's reluctance under instructions when finally given the chance to photograph Morgan in death continues to reflect the observer/observed dynamics of their previous encounters. Roget can take no pleasure in capturing a lifeless specimen removed from his natural surroundings in the manner of a decontextualised museum exhibit. Now dead and no longer offering the challenge of the chase as he did in life, Morgan may be a trophy in Wendlam's eyes, but not in Roget's.

A direct analogy between Morgan and the thylacine is drawn in the scene where he stops for a drink with a station owner while trying to find Roget and pose for his portrait. Noticing a print hanging on the wall, Morgan inquires about it and the station owner replies: 'That's an extinct animal, Morgan, like you'. This direct reference foreshadows the details of Morgan's final moments as he prepares to walk out of the Macpherson's station knowing that it is surrounded by Detective Manwaring and his men. The symbolic importance of the thylacine pelt is flagged when Morgan says he wants to wash his face and hands, then asks for his 'sacred skin ... the skin of an extinct animal' to be brought to him from his saddle outside. He makes a special point of telling the maid who is to fetch it: 'It's a sacred skin. Be careful how you untie it and bring it to me directly'. After washing, Morgan asks Mrs Macpherson to help him put the animal skin around his shoulders and, as he turns his back to the camera, the pelt is clearly recognisable as that of a thylacine for the first time. The action in this sequence resonates with references to Aboriginal ceremony.

Crosscuts to Manwaring iterating orders that Morgan should be taken alive and various shots of aimed rifles heighten the hunter/hunted tension, as does Morgan's demeanour as he walks towards his fate. Wearing his thylacine skin and feigning nonchalance by exclaiming 'It's a beautiful day' and urging himself to 'keep smiling' as he looks up into the clouds, Morgan's attitude resembles that of a wild animal, unaware and innocent of the human intent encircling him. A comment from one of Manwaring's men that Morgan 'is not even looking around' not only underlines the peculiarity of Morgan's conduct within the given situation, but also suggests the hunters' frustration in finding that their cornered prey will not, even at the point of death, deliver them the satisfaction of showing fear. And like hunters, once Morgan has been shot, the men run cheering towards him, as if he were a felled animal (*Appendix: compilation LXXXVII*).

The character of Roget provides a nexus between the two perspectives of animality presented in the film: that of the evolutionary 'throw-back' or 'speciesism', as exemplified by the authorities' perception of Morgan and the Aborigines, and that of Morgan's and Billy's societal and environmental pragmatism and their resultant perceptions of themselves. As he takes photographs of the Mayor costumed in medieval armour, Roget inquires about Morgan, a subject he is still chasing. The visual message alone invites critical comparison with Morgan's ideology in the contrast between the anachronistic and incongruous image that the Mayor is self-consciously presenting and Morgan's straightforward representational ambitions. In addition, the concurrent dialogue between Roget and the Mayor elucidates the duality of the animality theme by foregrounding the ideological differentiation which gives rise to the alternate

perspectives. When Roget asks the Mayor why Morgan killed McLean, he answers: 'Who knows? You can't fathom the heart of a gorilla, can you?' Roget's retort, 'He's not a gorilla, he's a man', is met with a response which exposes the theoretical beliefs underpinning the hegemonic viewpoint: 'Listen, I don't know how long you've been in the colony, but our problem here is we have a lot of born criminals – they come from convict stock' (*Appendix: excerpt LXXXVIII*).

Roget's interest in Morgan as 'exotica' does not extend to a view of him as a different or aberrant species. Consequently, Roget's existential standpoint delineates the borders separating the values implicit in the ideologies of the hierarchy and in those of the disenfranchised. Both ideologies embrace animality, but for differing reasons. For the Australian authorities, the classification of a criminal as an imperfectly evolved human safely places the cause and effect and future of the protagonist within a non-human anthropological realm. Criminals are 'other': their criminality has no connection with societal catalysts, so the obvious remedy to the problem is to ensure the extinction of the 'mutant species'. For Morgan, his animality is a point of considered pride: his practical experiences mirror the academic anthropological theory propounded in the narrative of the film. Morgan's initial survival depends upon Billy and he finds ultimate social acceptability within this 'uncivilised' or 'savage' mode of existence. Both are out of place and facing extinction: Morgan as an outlaw with a price on his head, Billy as a half-caste Aborigine, ostracised by his tribe and unwilling to subject himself to the indignities of a subsistence-level existence on a white Australian station. For both Billy and Morgan, living 'like animals' in the bush is an evolution rather than a devolution, on several

levels. When Morgan puts the thylacine pelt ceremoniously around his shoulders he is taking on the metaphorical mantle of the endangered and signalling that his death will be a defiance of passive resistance, not a defeat. Roget's attitude towards Morgan recognises the possibility of animality and humanity as coexistent qualities in a man.

As the hunt for Morgan intensifies, the authorities are increasingly depicted in conversations and surroundings exemplifying the ideology informing their predisposition towards him. Briefing the press of the latest developments in a direct address to camera, Superintendent Cobham is framed by two stuffed marsupials. A slow zoom-in to an extreme close-up of Cobham's face is followed by a matching extreme close-up of a bull terrier, marking a clear analogy between the two white heads of barely-contained ferocity. Cobham is next seen briefing his sergeant on the extra men and horses needed to capture 'the animal' Morgan: in the background, two prisoners caged like animals in a zoo underline the superintendent's words. At lunch with the coroner, Cobham asks him what 'creates a monster' like Morgan; could he be 'half man, half animal?' Dismissing Darwin's theory of the origin of the species as 'new nonsense', the coroner expands on Professor Halford's comparative studies between the anatomy of men and gorillas and posits Morgan to be: 'like most criminals ... a throwback to primitive man'.

On hearing the news that Morgan has taken Evans hostage, Cobham's dialogue shows his attitude towards the search to be that of an animal hunt. He tells his sergeant to telegraph every officer he can as he wants, 'the cry of my hounds in his ears' and 'his spleen on my desk by sundown'. The high camera angle works to accentuate Cobham's frustration and

fury by emphasising his brutishly bald, large white head, effecting a personification of white rage. Continuing with this theme, an image of bull terriers yapping excitedly is inserted after Superintendent Winch expresses his certainty that they are closing in on Morgan, and Detective Manwaring later comments that he can ‘almost smell him’. When Billy is captured and questioned as Cobham handles a dog-lead in the foreground, the *mise-en-scène* works to suggest that Billy will soon be harmed with this animal-related prop and the expectation is confirmed as Cobham strangles him with the chain (*Appendix: compilation LXXXIX*).

In line with their attitude towards him in life, Cobham and the coroner recast the dead Morgan’s body as that of a specimen. Cobham asks the doctor to cut Morgan’s beard off as a souvenir and responds to Winch’s objection by adding, ‘and cut off the scrotum ... might make an interesting tobacco pouch’. The coroner asks if he can send Morgan’s head to the Professor for study after making a death mask in the traditional manner. Cobham replies:

Frankly, I consider Morgan scarcely human, therefore
he is not entitled to the consideration due to other
men, however criminal. By all means, off with his
head ... and don’t forget the scrotum.

The indignity of Morgan’s treatment in death is countered wordlessly but powerfully by the ending of the film: an image of a blue and white-clouded sky recalling the nobility of his final walk towards his captors is followed by that of Billy performing his defiant kookaburra call. Contextualised in this way, the final image depicting Roget’s photograph of Wendlan posing with his rifle over Morgan’s body conversely shows the

authorities to be the true possessors of all the negative qualities they have attributed to the outlaw (*Appendix: excerpt XC*).

As in *Mad Dog Morgan*, articulations of masculinity and identity also find expression through the exploration of boundaries, including those between the human and the animal, in *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (1994), directed by Stephan Elliot. Representing homosexual identity, the narrative necessarily addresses hegemonic conceptions of gender and ‘critique[s] the complex terrain of masculinity, ultimately questioning the viability of any sustained category, or set of defining characteristics, about what constitutes the masculine’, and one of the ways it does this is through the ‘relationship between certain kinds of anatomical bodies’ (Lucas, 1998, pp. 146-147).

Priscilla is identified by Carter (1996) as a significant text, commensurate with *Crocodile Dundee*, marking the development of the representation of Australian identity in general, and Australian masculinity in particular, away from the traditional codes and conventions implicit within films centred upon pastoral Australian landscapes. The desert landscapes of the ‘red centre’ portrayed as the cabaret troupe comprising of the film’s protagonists journey towards Alice Springs in the eponymous bus, provide the fresh settings which make *Priscilla* ‘one of the most interesting statements of “belonging” that Australian culture has yet produced’ (Carter, 1996, p. 95). The desert landscapes function as dramatic backdrops for the poses and performances of the three main characters, effecting various *tableaux vivants* on the theme of ‘a cock in a frock on a rock’, to quote Bernadette. As Lucas comments, *Priscilla* is ‘concerned with surfaces, with glittering,

sequined and transformative appearances ... in its play between costumes of various kinds' (1998, p. 146).

Prima facie, *Priscilla* is remarkable for the lack of animals depicted within the film's *mise-en-scène*. Kangaroo carcasses function as codes signalling provincialism and antipathy towards the protagonists. Mr and Mrs Spencer, the couple who come to Bernadette's aid after the bus has broken down only to drive away again on the realisation that the people stranded are drag queens, have kangaroo carcasses in the back of their ute. A trussed kangaroo rotating on a spit with its head still intact suggests the loutishness of the group of men that Felicia encounters in Coober Pedy and foreshadows the treatment she is soon to receive from them (*Appendix: compilation XCI*). The landscape is portrayed as barren and almost devoid of any non-human animal life. Four cut-ins of extreme close-ups of lizards, a skink and ants are used at intervals during the sequence when the bus has broken down away from the sealed road. The images stand alone, as neither the editing nor the small proportion of the *mise-en-scène* visible beyond the subjects connect the animals directly with the main action of the plot (*Appendix: compilation XCII*).

This editing style contrasts with that found in *Walkabout* and *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, as discussed in chapters 2 and 3. In both these films, extreme close-ups of reptiles and insects are used as establishing shots, suggesting the animal's independence and the power of their belonging in the environment, but they are most often followed by images contextualising their role or position within the narrative. In *Walkabout*, for example, an

extreme close-up of a spider is followed by a shot of the White Boy's shoe stepping close to it as he continues on his journey; in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* an extreme close-up of ants is followed by a mid-shot showing the Valentine cake they are feasting upon. In *Priscilla*, the editing style of the break-down sequence works to emphasise the remoteness of the area while still maintaining a separation or disconnection between the protagonists and their surroundings.

In their decontextualisation, the animal images in *Priscilla* echo the film's concern with surfaces and superficiality (Lucas, 1998, p. 146) by functioning primarily as *signs* of wilderness. The images certainly suggest that the 'girls' have entered into an alien environment in which the non-humans may well have the upper hand, but the resulting tension is not so much about danger and the fear of survival than the fear of being upstaged; of losing their position as the prima donnas of spectacle and exoticism, the principal show of 'wildlife' to be found in the desert setting. Such a comparison between the animals and the protagonists is openly implied in two cross-cuts linking Mitzi directly with the ants and the horny toad lizard as he - looking much like an exotic insect himself - practises a routine in full costume on a ridge.

A single contextualised shot of an animal is used at the end of the break-down sequence, when a lizard scurries over an empty vodka bottle. Coming after the party with the Aborigines, the image points to the troupe's imminent rescue with the arrival of Bob the mechanic, by emphasising the impression of human activity upon the landscape. Divested of its iconic stature, cut-down to size through the proportional comparison offered by the

mise-en-scène, the lizard retreats out of frame as if conceding defeat in the battle for the spotlight. The only other significant representation of a live animal along *Priscilla's* journey is that of a single cockatoo when the troupe goes for a swim in a lake: a cutaway shows the bird silhouetted amidst the tree branches in the twilight. Deprived of colour in this way, the monochromatic image once again suggests that the protagonists are not to be outshone by any plumage brighter than their own (*Appendix: compilation XCIII*).

Living animals are generally absent from *Priscilla's mise-en-scène* because Bernadette, Mitzi and Felicia are themselves the exotica decorating the landscape. The lack of real animal-life portrayal is countered by the animal representations which feature in the costuming of the troupe as they near their destination. The iconic animal-inspired flamboyance of these costumes contrasts with the iconic human-inspired costuming evident in the Sydney sequences at the beginning and the end of the film. The first suggestion of this animal theme comes after Felicia's beating in Coober Pedy when she fashions the head-bandage protecting her bruised jaw into rabbit ears. Once in Alice Springs and calling themselves 'The Sisters of the Simpson Desert', the troupe's costumes, conveyed in a montage of the numbers in their show, primarily feature designs centring on indigenous Australian animals. Bernadette first wears a plumed head-dress reminiscent of a lyrebird; next all three appear as emus and then as composite lizards, bearing the features of both the frilly and the horny toad (*Appendix: compilation XCIV*).

An animal-centred reading of the film clarifies Carter's valuable observation of *Priscilla* as a novel articulation of Australian belonging by providing the vivid and explicit

examples of supporting evidence lacking in his thesis. In his efforts to illustrate the 'homely' quality of the landscape and its 'uniquely familiar kind of otherness' as an environment that is neither 'tamed' nor 'domesticated' (1996, p. 94), Carter's explications are at best vague and at worst misplaced. He asserts that:

the landscape represents ... [the] exotic and familiar, primeval and modern, traditional and trashy, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, [where] Aboriginal and Abba are put into plausible, unpredictable ... relationships to each other. (1996, p. 94)

Carter focuses on the role of the film's Aboriginal characters to illustrate his point:

In this scenario the meeting between the three white characters and Aboriginal characters in the desert is a key moment which the film handles in an original manner. Although the Aborigines might 'loom up out of the desert' as they do in so many previous narratives, here they're also located in the contemporary world where bad pop songs can be good fun: the racial and ethnic difference does not do work [*sic*] as a difference in time. After all, who's anachronistic, who's dancing to pop songs two or more decades past their prime? The Aborigines in this scene also maintain a kind of privacy. We might have expected that the exoticness or otherworldliness of our three heroes would function in the film as a key giving them access to this private Aboriginal world. But it doesn't. Nor does the scene present us with a neat figure of fusion where all differences dissolve away. This is why I'm drawn to the word 'hybrid': the exotic and familiar on both sides are performed together, before our eyes, but so are the differences that the various characters inhabit. And the song they perform together is 'I Will Survive'! (1996, pp. 94-95)

With its stagy sterility the landscape is neither welcoming nor unwelcomingly, but rather a passive backdrop for the heroes' activity. The neutral timbre of its indigenous

representation— both animal *and* human - results from the disconnection articulated through the editing style. Instead of ‘looming out of the desert’, a single Aboriginal character first appears in extreme close-up. As with the initial animal images of the break-down sequence, the editing here works to decontextualise, and by doing so allows the subject to convey an existential quality that is both immutable and fundamentally separate from that of the main protagonists. This is a representation of timelessness: there is no sense of the primeval or the modern, and consequently there is no anachronism. The ‘privacy’ of the Aboriginal characters which Carter identifies is not so much an expression of indigenous representation than a function of the film’s performance motif which requires the maintenance of an essential separation between the trio and the landscape. The Aboriginal characters all remain nameless, including the man who joins the ‘girls’ in a rendition of ‘I Will Survive’. The surreal treatment of the sequence, in which the constraints of real-time narration are abandoned as the performers suddenly appear in full costume and make-up, visually emphasises *disconnection* at the very point in the plot where the Aboriginal and white characters dance together. Consequently, the choice of song can be read as resonating on a more superficial level than Carter indicates. Within the ideology of the film, the survival referred to here can only be that of the protagonists’ impending rescue and their passage out of the wilderness. The song serves more simply as a celebration of the renewed viability of the trio’s short-term ambitions, rather than as an anthem for solidarity amongst the marginalised (*Appendix: compilation XCV*).

The wilderness in *Priscilla* is rendered 'homely' through the absence of challenges and dangers it offers beyond those of its size. The landscape is not 'tamed' because it is at no point wild. Contrary to Carter's observation, it is however 'domesticated' to a certain extent. Even when the bus has broken down, the trio breakfast like picnickers out on a day-trip. As a backdrop for the girls' creative activities, such as painting, kite flying and dressing up, the landscape is often rendered as quiescent as wallpaper. The kitsch aesthetic integral to the camp style of their characterisation inflects a domesticated homeliness upon their surroundings by supplying the *mise-en-scène* with flourishes of iconic femininity from various sources, including the Hollywood legend and the suburban housewife (*Appendix: compilation XCVI*).

An animal-centred reading of *Priscilla* also leads to the recognition of the signification implicit in the role of the 'Logo Lady' (as she appears in the credits) which contributes to a more rounded analysis of the relations between landscape and identity articulated in the film. First encountered as a competing event or *spectacle* when Bernadette, Mitzi and Felicia set off on their adventure, the Logo Lady continues to function as an arbitrary locus of correspondence by obviously crossing their path in the desert at intermittent intervals as she goes along on her own personal adventure, jogging from one coast of the Australian continent to the other. The Logo Lady's presence in the narrative reinforces the benign characterisation of the landscape in several ways. As a lone jogger on a substantially longer journey than that of the protagonists and without the protection of a bus, on one level her manifestations function as confirmations of the safety of the landscape. Taking her gender into account, her status as a female not only amplifies this

effect but also prompts the idea of a more direct comparison with the trio's quest (*Appendix: compilation XCVII*).

The appearances of the Logo Lady can also be read as a human substitution for the missing animal life. Like an animal, she appears fleetingly; and with animal-like self-containment and self-absorption. It is not some mysterious animal noise in the night which startles the troupe but her passing, prompting Bernadette to exclaim: 'What the fuck's that?' (*Appendix: excerpt XCVIII*). The Logo Lady's main role in the narrative can be read as highlighting the film's true locus of danger and fear: not the animals or the landscape, but human society. Flashbacks tell of the childhood experiences and abuses which have moulded the protagonists' sexuality. In Broken Hill, when the girls try to order a drink in the Palace Hotel bar, the butch Shirley tells them: 'We've got nothing here for people like you'. The next morning they find their bus has been graffitied with the legend 'Aids fuckers go home'. After Felicia's beating in Coober Pedy, Bernadette's observations about Sydney address the theme directly:

It's funny, we all sit around mindlessly
slagging off that vile stink-hole of a city but
in some strange way it takes care of us. Don't
let it drag you down, let it toughen you up. I
can only fight because I've learned to. Being a
man one day and a woman the next isn't an easy
thing to do.

In *Priscilla*, the wilderness to be pioneered is that of provincial society. The protagonists' journey is about facing the challenges of their sexual identity in an alien *existential* landscape. By the end of the film Mitzi has come to terms with the idea of being a father

and Bernadette decides to stay in Alice Springs and chance a relationship with Bob. In line with this interpretation, two songs are of greater significance in the film than 'I Will Survive'. Performed by Mitzi during the opening credits, the lyrics of 'I've Never Been to Me' describe physical journeys devoid of self-knowledge, while the lyrics of 'Finally It's Happened to Me', performed by the trio in Alice Springs at the narrative denouement, describe the joys of self-discovery and fulfilment.

Like Morgan and his thylacine pelt in *Mad Dog Morgan*, the animal costumes in *Priscilla* indicate the taking on – or stepping into – a new-found sense of identity. While Morgan's transmutation is negative, however, indicating his acceptance of his imminent extinction, the trio's transmutations are positive, indicating the sense of 'belonging' they have found beyond their lives in Sydney. The introduction of, and increase in, the animal-inspired costumes along their journey marks the progress of the protagonists' emotional development, but it is only when they metaphorically enter the spirit of the land that they dress in complete animal costumes, thus signalling their acceptance of a broader Australian identity. The representation of identity offered by *Priscilla* is, therefore, noteworthy as a contemporary statement of social belonging delivered through an innovative exploration of the traditional city/bush dichotomy. The motif of hybridisation functions as a key to identity in the film, as Carter maintains, but it does so significantly more powerfully in terms of male homosexual identity than in those of non-Aboriginal/Aboriginal identity.

In both *Mad Dog Morgan* and *Priscilla*, the practical activities relating to the animal image portraying representations of male identity involve the transference of animal qualities and transmutations on various levels. Both films are concerned with emotional journeys as much as temporal or geographical ones. For Morgan, society's perception of his animality, and ultimately his own, define him as unfitted to the society of the land, rather than the landscape itself. For Mitzi and Bernadette, their costumed animality is a celebration of discovering new social roles: Mitzi as father to his son, Bernadette as a partner to Bob. Along with Felicia, their journey has also given them a new geographical perspective on their existential concerns as homosexuals. With a new appreciation for their life in Sydney, Mitzi and Felicia decide to return to the city, while Bernadette is willing to try life in the bush. In comparison with the male protagonists from *The Man From Snowy River* and *Crocodile Dundee*, who are seen to change the circumstances of their environment by 'impressing on them the stamp of [their] own inner nature' (Hegel, cited in Gibson, 1992, p. 67), the protagonists in *Mad Dog Morgan* and *Priscilla* can, in their differing ways, be described as entering into the landscape. This mode of representation accords with the marginal quality of their identities, as exemplified in the films discussed in chapter 2.

Mad Dog Morgan and *Priscilla* both present the outback, with its 'power for metamorphosis' in the 'shuttle between opposites [and] the disintegration of categories' (Morris, 1988, p. 257), as 'an ideal site for the staging of knowledge conflicts' and both evince animality at their resolutions. Questions of identity and belonging are similarly addressed through a more centrally-placed animality in the horror film, discussed in the

following chapter, where the outback provides ‘prime territory for darwinian [*sic*] fancies of throwbacks, remnants, mutants, the (primitive) origin and the (apocalyptic) end of life’ (Morris, 1988, p. 257).

Chapter 4

The indigenous/feral dichotomy: animal monsters and anxieties of belonging

The animal-centred reading is a familiar trope in the analysis of horror films. As discussed in the introduction, the distinction between humans and animals is central to the concept of human identity in anthropocentric cultures (Berger, 1980; Serpell, 1986; Shapiro, 1990). The differentiation of the animal marks it as ‘other’ and thus a locus of fear (Cohen, 1996), be it worry, anxiety, terror, fright, paranoia, dread or horror. Animal monsters have long featured in the collective cultural psyche of the human imagination (Freud, 1952; Serpell, 1986; Carroll, 1990; Wood, 1979). Like monsters in general, animal monsters can also be indicative of more specific representations of national identity (Ward, 1995) by articulating localised historical or geographical concerns.

In his survey of the history of Australian and New Zealand horror films, Hood concludes that no characteristically Australian examples of the genre ‘in content and approach’ can be identified before the early days of the 1970s Revival (Hood, 1994). Australian horror has been identified by dominant commentary as an ‘indigenous genre’ or ‘mode’ sufficiently distinct from American and European models to be classified as ‘Australian Gothic’ (Dermody & Jacka, 1988; Rayner, 2000). Dermody and Jacka’s definition highlights this differentiation:

There is a kinship to the horror film, hybridized by the generic mix which may include action, western, rock musical, sci-fi fantasy, teen film, bikie film. The horror film, however ... tends to be a conservative form ... The blackness of Australian Gothic invites a wry, knowing, surreal self-mockery which generally steers it away from conservatism. (1988, pp. 51-52)

As Rayner observes, the 'category' of Australian Gothic is 'broad':

Instead of a genre, Australian Gothic represents a mode, a stance and an atmosphere, after the fashion of American Film Noir, with the appellation suggesting the inclusion of horrific and fantastical materials comparable to those of Gothic literature. (2000, p. 24)

Peter Weir's independently produced short film *Homesdale* (1971) is generally cited as the first film text to display the salient characteristics of the mode, subsequently influencing the motifs and style of a diverse range of films including *Walkabout*, *Wake in Fright* (Dir. Kotcheff, 1971), *The Cars That Ate Paris* (Dir. Weir, 1974), *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Last Wave* (Dir. Weir, 1977), *Long Weekend* (Dir. Eggleston, 1978), the *Mad Max* trilogy (Dir. Miller & Ogilvie, 1979-1985), *Heatwave* (Dir. Noyce, 1982), *Star Struck* (Dir. Armstrong, 1982), *Going Down* (Dir. Keenan, 1983), *Man of Flowers* (Dir. Cox, 1983), *Razorback* (Dir. Mulcahy, 1984), *Bliss* (Dir. Lawrence, 1985), *Shame* (Dir. Jodrell, 1988), *Dead Calm* (Dir. Noyce, 1989), *Bad Boy Bubby* (Dir. de Heer, 1993), *Love Serenade* (Dir. Barrett, 1995), *Welcome to Woop Woop* (Dir. Elliot, 1998), *The Goddess of 1967* (Dir. Law, 2000) and *Walk the Talk* (Dir. Barrett, 2000) amongst others (Dermody & Jacka, 1988; Rayner, 2000; Wilson, 2001).

While many of these films cannot be neatly classified even within the parameters of the codes and conventions comprising an Australian inflected horror genre, they all share interlocking themes of repression, isolation and the transgression of nature or the 'natural'. Rayner's exposition of these themes recognises their subversive quality:

They are: a questioning of established authority; a disillusionment with the social reality that that authority maintains; and the protagonist's search for a tenable identity once the true nature of the human environment has been revealed. These themes are interlinked, and reflect a doubt or dubiety in the assertions of national character and confidence in national institutions which characterized earlier examples of Australian films. (2000, p.25)

Rayner sub-classifies Australian Gothic into 'rural Gothic' and 'urban Gothic', taking the predominant setting of the film and the narrative themes explored as the categorising features (2000, pp. 28-57). In rural Gothic films, such as *Razorback*, the community's isolation fosters a 'secret depravity' or perversion that is brought to light by the accidental intrusion of outsiders (Rayner, 2000, p. 29). As Rayner notes, these texts most closely follow the codes and conventions of the classic horror genre, including 'social polemics, fantasy and allegory' (2000, p. 29). Urban Gothic films, for example *Howling III: The Marsupials*, tend to have narratives in which 'the ordinary grasp on life that seems to sustain the protagonists is thrown into psychic and emotional disorder' (MacFarlane cited in Rayner, 2000, p. 44). In these films, the conspiracies and perversions uncovered are those of the authorities, and the landscape is invoked to highlight the shortcomings or hypocrisy of modern urban society in comparison to the natural environment or traditional cultures (Rayner, 2000, p. 44).

The three dichotomies central to dominant white Australian representational discourse outlined by Turner - country versus city, rural versus urban and nature versus society - all function with equal importance in both rural and urban Gothic categories:

While each of these pairs differs from the other in certain respects, they are all attempts to label the perceived split between life within an Australian urban, social environment and life which takes place within, and is thus determined by the demands of, the landscape. (1986, p. 25)

Turner identifies the nature/society opposition, or more specifically the opposition of 'the Australian version of nature' and white society, as the most fundamental to Australian representational discourse as it holds expressions of 'the duality of the promise' (1986, p. 25) particular to the Australian context: the paradox of beginning which colours the ideological negotiations of the development of its identity, as discussed in chapter 1. Consequently, the motif of the 'burden of place' (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 21) encompasses and overrides the polarities of the bush/city dichotomy, being central to white Australian culture and ideology as a whole. Even within an urban setting, the collective Australian psyche of the white Australian imagination struggles to find the balance between absorbing the character of the landscape, as described by Judith Wright (1965, p. ix.) and being absorbed - or overwhelmed - by it.

The role played by the landscape in the development of white Australia's national identity is well documented (Docker, 1994; Turner, 1986; White, 1981). The observations of Rayner, Turner and Wright cited above all point to the significance of the

representational details within the *mise-en-scène* of the environment. Yet, as previous chapters have shown, very little has been written about the role of animals in articulating this representational detail. The following discussion of *Howling III: The Marsupials* and *Razorback* will illustrate the various ways in which animals function as signifiers in landscapes of horror, the role of the indigenous/feral dichotomy, and its specific relevance to explorations of the anxiety of belonging in the dialectic of white Australian identity.

With the exception of *Razorback*, examples of unequivocally ‘natural nasties’ (Tudor, 1989) or ‘zoohorror’ (Ward, 1995) - animal monsters such as Spielberg’s *Jaws* (1975), familiar from American examples of the genre - are notably absent in post-Revival Australian horror films. Edmund Burkes’ (1968) concept of the sublime and Morris’s application of the concept to Australian cinema (1998) are fundamental to an animal-centred analysis of the genre. In chapter 2, the discussion focused on the ways in which the otherworldly aspects of the sublime are invoked in response to the metaphysical problematics of white Australian perception ‘where nothing can be described’ (Gibson, 1992, p. 65). For the consideration of horror in this study, the qualities of dread and danger inherent in the notion of the sublime will be brought to the fore. Both elements are of course interconnected: intimations of dread and danger arise from the awe of the indescribable.

Analyses of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* provide a case in point. Contextualised within the ‘dread’ aspect of the sublime aesthetic, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* is conceived as a Gothic

horror text (Dermody & Jacka, 1988; Hood, 1994; Rayner, 2000), expressing the nightmare of the landscape. Alternatively, contextualised within the 'awe' aspect (see chapter 2), the film can be interpreted more positively as an expression of cultural development and identity: as a 'nationing film', to borrow Carter's term for landscape films of the 1990s (1996); 'a daydream' (Berger, 1980, p. 15) of the possibility of assimilation with the environment as opposed to the nightmare of alienation. Deconstruction of the general theme of alienation from the landscape prevalent in Australian horror films reveals many sub-themes or modes of articulation. These 'anxious dreams of conquering space' (Morris, 1998, p. 242) include rhetorics of loss, alien contact, invasion, miscegenation, inbreeding and apocalyptic catastrophe (Morris, 1998; Hood, 1994).

Howling III: The Marsupials (1987), scripted and produced as well as directed by Philippe Mora, is the third of a series of eight films based on the novels of Gary Brandner that began in 1980 with *The Howling*, a 'cult' werewolf parody directed by Joe Dante (Scheib, 2001) and ended in 1995 with the direct-to-video *Howling: New Moon Rising* (Dir. Clive Turner). In the context of Australian cinema studies, *Howling III's* significance resides in its absence. Despite the volume of revisionist film analyses and discourses on Australian Gothic or horror produced in the two decades since its release, the film remains - perhaps studiously - ignored. It is not referenced by the *Australian Film Commission* or the *Australian Film Institute*. It is not listed in Murray's 1978 to 1994 survey of Australian film (1995), and in *The Oxford Companion to Australian Film* it is only mentioned as one of two 'other Australian films' in the footnote at the end of director Philippe Mora's entry, written by Brian McFarlane, and comprising of nearly

600 words (McFarlane, Mayer & Bertrand, 1999, p. 326). Most surprisingly, it does not even rate a mention in Hood's 1994 survey of Australian and New Zealand horror films. However, largely due to the cult status of *Howling I*, *Howling III* does have a presence on the internet in film data-bases and genre-specific sites. The entries comprise mostly of reviews, plot summaries and credits. When analysis is present, it centres on the film's use of American genre conventions and parody; Australian inflections are noted, but there is no discussion of motifs in relation to Australian identity or cultural concerns.

Along with *Howling II*, also directed by Mora, *Howling III* features in *Eopinion*'s list of '300 Worst Movies of All Time' and one reviewer specifies the director as 'the man responsible for the two worst films of all time' (cited in Massaro, 2005, ¶4). The main problems identified are that the film fails to satisfy genre expectations as either comedy, horror, werewolf film or even parody (Howe, 1987; Scheib, 2001; Massaro, 2005; Raffel, 2006). As a comedy, the general consensus is that any humour present arises unintentionally; as a horror film it lacks any explicit gore or terrifying moments - 'no chilling thoughts, no gruesome deaths, no blood drenched fangs or even screaming damsels' (Massaro, 2005, As an Australian film, ¶3). For werewolf fans, the promise of the originality of the concept of were-thylacines, the eponymous marsupials, ultimately disappoints as Mora's film deviates too far from the ethos of the traditional mythology. In *Howling III*, rather than being inherently evil, lycanthropes are simply misunderstood and in as much need of liberation as any marginalised cultural group (Canby, 1987).

All these shortcomings point to the film's role as a parody, yet few critics find it to be successful as such, even if they identify the mode as the last refuge of Mora's intent. Criticism centres on the 'cheap and terrible' (Scheib, 2001, ¶4) costuming and special effects, rendering the film as barely distinguishable from either of the two film-within-the-films it sets out to parody. Commenting on one of these - *It Came From Uranus!* – an anonymous reviewer notes:

[It] has a wonderful shot of a transforming arm which is very obviously not attached to the 'monster's' body! Actually, I really do have to pause a moment here and say how much I admire the nerve (if not necessarily the judgment) of Philippe Mora in including this scene, since the 'special effects' in ICFU aren't all that much worse than the ones in *Howling III*. (*Howling III: The Marsupials*, 2006, ¶3)

Others are less generous towards Mora's 'unabashed amateurishness' (Scheib, 2001, ¶3). Dismissing the film as 'silliness' with 'Australian color, not-so-special effects and barely enough camp to fill a wallaby's pouch' (Howe, 1987, ¶1), Howe's review for the *Washington Post* sums up the majority verdict.

In view of the above, the rationale behind the choice of *Howling III* for analysis requires more explanation than those of the other films discussed in this thesis. Primarily, *Howling III* provides a rich source of examples of the themes and motifs that comprise the Australian Gothic aesthetic. Analysis of this single text highlights many of the varied strands of the discourse that feature separately in other films of the mode or genre. In the context of this study, consideration of *Howling III* necessitates a brief deviation from

pure textual analysis to include authorship, as recognition of the styles and themes which run through Mora's body of work addresses many of the problems identified with the film.

Philippe Mora's extensive filmography as director and writer shows him to be 'a man for all genres' (Foreman, 2001, ¶1), responsible for a considerable number of highly acclaimed and popular films. Most salient in the canon of Australian cinema are *Mad Dog Morgan* (1976), as scriptwriter and director (see chapter 3 for detailed discussion), and *Newsfront* (Dir. Noyce, 1978), for which he co-wrote the screenplay. Both films received critical acclaim: *Mad Dog Morgan* was nominated by the AFI for 'Best Director' and awarded 'Best Western' at the Cannes Film Festival (McFarlane, Mayer & Betrand, 1999, p. 326). *Newsfront* was nominated for fifteen AFI awards and won eight, including 'Best Film' and 'Best Original Screenplay'. Prior to *Newsfront*, Mora had written and directed two feature-length films - first in the UK and then in the US - employing innovative combinations of documentary and newsreel footage interwoven with home-movies and fictional films. Selected for screening at Cannes, *Swastika* (1973) mixes footage from Eva Braun's Berchtesgarden home-movies with German propaganda films, creating a powerfully intimate portrayal of the rise of Hitler and 'the banality of evil'. Mora employs this technique again in *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?* (1975), effecting commentary solely through editing by juxtaposing newsreel footage with clips from period films and period music. This poignant documentary was nominated for a Golden Globe award. In 1986 he directed *Death of a Soldier*, a political drama based on the murder of Eddie Leonski in Melbourne during the Second World War. As well as

testifying to his creativity and cinematic skill, Mora's involvement in these films points to his interest in political and social issues.

After a six year hiatus following *Mad Dog Morgan*, the release of *The Beast Within*, in 1982, marks the beginning of Mora's professional forays into parody, satire, fantasy and the more visceral aspects of film. Made in the US, this 'transformation' horror is noted for the quality of its special effects and the director's imaginative and effective portrayals of gore (Scheib, 1990). The plot revolves around the teenage son of a rape victim and his revenge killing-spree as he mutates into a cicada-creature. Mora's next horror film was *Howling II: Stirba – Werewolf Bitch* (1985), the first sequel to Joe Dante's popular tongue-in-cheek generic celebration, *The Howling* (1980). The film was not well received; criticised for lacking the humour of the first, plot-incoherence and the mixing of vampire and werewolf traditions, amongst other failings, which Mora blames on directorially unauthorised post-production changes (Scheib, 1990; Foreman, 2001). Mora gives the impression that it was the location of the shoot and political interest rather than any other consideration which prompted him to accept the project:

Howling II came about when I was approached by the producers with the intriguing proposal to shoot the film behind the (then) Iron Curtain in Prague. Adventures shooting a werewolf film in a Communist country during the Cold War would make a movie in itself. At one point we got secret permission from the Vatican to desecrate King Wencelas' crypt so that they could send a bishop into Prague to reconsecrate it. We managed to please the Vatican and the Communists. (Foreman, 2001, ¶13)

The two other comedy/fantasy/horror films directed by Mora are *Pterodactyl Woman from Beverly Hills* (1994) and *Mother's Little Murderer* (2004). Like *Howling II*, these films are pure generic exercises, exhibiting no remarkable commentary on the human condition beyond that traditional within the genre. When considered in comparison with his other horror films, the significance of the themes and motifs evident in *Howling III* is thrown into relief.

Other themes relevant to the following discussion explored by Mora within his filmography include environmental concerns and alien contact. *A Breed Apart* (1984) is the story of a reclusive Vietnam veteran and his fight against egg-collectors to protect the local bird population from extinction. The biographical drama *Communion* (1989) is based on artist, broadcaster and author Streiber's account of his own alleged encounters with aliens, while in *According to Occam's Razor* (1999), Mora approaches the same subject more ambiguously in mockumentary style. Once again, the director mixes home-movies with stock-footage to explore both the fact and the fantasy inherent in the alien phenomenon, linking Winston Churchill, Ronald Reagan and Adolf Hitler with the topic in the process. Nazism is a recurrent theme in Mora's filmography; his mother was a WWII Holocaust camp survivor and his father in the French Resistance (Director *Continues to Strike a Nerve*, 2000). His diverse treatments of the subject suggest that the seriousness of his intent to explore Nazism is not reflected in his choice of genre.

Following the documentary *Swastika* (1973), noted above above, Mora revisits Nazi-themed territory in *The Return of Captain Invincible* (1983) and again in *Snide and Prejudice* (1997). *The Return of Captain Invincible* is a musical comedy and super-hero

spoof in which the protagonist employs his superpowers against the Nazis. With the tagline ‘He couldn’t tell Reich from Wrong’ (Snide and Prejudice, 2006, ¶1), *Snide and Prejudice* is a black comedy set in a contemporary Los Angeles asylum where therapy sessions reveal Hitler’s power to be alive and well, thriving in the patients’ subconscious. For Mora, articulations through fantasy, horror, sci-fi or musical are as equally valid as those made through documentary or drama, as is the mixing of styles, modes and genres within a single text. Speaking of *The Adventures of Captain Invisible*, which also interweaves newsreel and documentary footage, Mora describes the film as a ‘kind of encyclopaedia of movies’: ‘I decided to make a musical with every possible musical style imaginable. Not just a Broadway style like *Oklahoma* [sic], let’s have a ballad, a punk thing, rock and roll’ (Director Continues to Strike a Nerve, 2002, ¶9).

Howling III is not only the first werewolf film to be set in Australia but also the first Australian werewolf film. The significance of this representation goes beyond the appreciation expressed by *Howling* series commentators for the exoticism of the setting and the originality of its were-thylacine conceit. The werewolf, in both figure and mythology, is well-suited to narrative explorations of Australian national identity. Like other depictions of human-animal forms or transformations, the werewolf or lycanthrope (from the Greek for wolf, ‘lukos’, and for man, ‘anthropos’) is an embodiment of animal/human parallelism, and as such is aptly to expression of the nature/culture discourse (Berger, 1980; Thomas, 1983). Anthropological theory traces werewolf mythology back to the animism of the Palaeolithic era, evident in cave paintings and sculptures depicting ‘numerous human-animal hybrids’ (Rondina, 2004, ¶3). The first examples relating to the Indo-European werewolf tradition in narrative appear in

Gilgamesh, the Summarian epic prose-poem written circa 2000 BC, and the legends of Ancient Greek mythology (Fiske, 2006), such as the story of Lycaon in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, written circa 8 AD (Rondina, 2004). In the legend, Lycaon is turned into a wolf as punishment from the gods for cannibalism (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Bk I:199-243, 2006). In eating human flesh he is a

committer of that ultimate metamorphosis, human eating human ... [a] human turning another person not just into food but into himself. And the two vices are both boundary crossings ... hence his own species boundaries are violated by the metamorphosis into a wolf. (Bynum, 1999, ¶10)

Like all monsters, werewolves 'are not only physically threatening; they are cognitively threatening' (Carroll, 1990, p. 34). According to Carroll monsters are:

un-natural relative to a culture's conceptual scheme of nature. They do not fit the scheme; they violate it ... They are threats to common knowledge ... For such monsters are in a certain sense challenges to the foundations of a culture's way of thinking. (1990, p. 34)

The transposition of an Indo-European monster-myth to the white Australian context, wherein the conception of nature as 'unnatural' is the cultural norm, creates a paradox which redoubles the allegorical signification of the original. Australian anxiety towards assimilation with the landscape is superimposed upon a primordial nature/culture concern. Thus, the fear of being reclaimed by nature, possessed by bestial appetites and subsequently banished from human society for violations of cultural codes, co-exists with

the white Australian need to venture into a relationship with nature; to understand it and be accepted by it, in order to survive and develop new cultural codes, appropriate to the environment.

The articulation of this Australian inflected paradox motivates the portrayal of ‘monstrosity’ in *Howling III*. The resulting violations of not only genre expectations but also genre boundaries explain the film’s failure to resonate with werewolf enthusiasts. Mora’s representation evokes the more benign role of the werewolf in ritual and folklore prevalent in Europe before the Renaissance and the Cartesian mind/body split of the Enlightenment (Bynum, 1999). It is a portrayal which maintains the link between werewolf mythology and the totemic beliefs of the Palaeolithic era, when certain aspects of animals were ritually invoked and merged with the human form in expressions of spirituality (Rondina, 2004). According to anthropological theory, the existing visual depictions of these human-animal figures do not suggest belief in the physical possibility of such transformations so much as a ‘calling’ to the powers of animals for help and guidance with, predominantly environmental, existential concerns. The role of transformation can, therefore, be regarded as ceremonial: achieved through the ‘wearing of animal skins, body pigment or tattooing, and weapons mimicking claws or fangs’ (Rondina, 2004, ¶2). This transformational theme is evident in *Mad Dog Morgan*, as discussed previously, when Morgan wears his thylacine pelt to meet his fate at the end of the film. In *Mad Dog Morgan*, Mora explores Australian identity and belonging through the juxtaposition of two opposing views of animality, ultimately suggesting that it is the polarisation of nature and culture at the heart of European ideology, and the resulting

disdain for any values or practices which do not maintain this distinction, which denies existential peace to the white Australian.

In *Howling III*, animality is replaced by monstrosity, but it is nonetheless a representational exploration of identity. The absence of specific Australian analytical interest in the film to date can be attributed to the fact that it is a genre film, and an unsuccessful one at that. As McFarlane and Mayer observe:

Australian films that have consciously reworked recognisable American genres have often suffered in Australia because of a suspicion that they are not 'truly Australian' and have not received the critical support that other, less interesting, films have. (McFarlane & Mayer, 1992, p. 98)

Where critical space has been afforded to films reworking genres perceived as American - the road movie, the Western or the populist comedy, for example - outstanding commercial success has been the mitigating factor. Consequently, the *Mad Max* series, *The Man From Snowy River* and *Crocodile Dundee* have all been increasingly discussed within the context of Australian cinema studies over the past two decades. As a commercial failure, *Howling III* does not even rate a mention in Dermody and Jacka's discussion of the 'third' aesthetic, comprising:

films derived from loosely-formed and lightly-held notions of 'genre' from outside the culture of origin, conceived in terms of market exploitation categories, including home video and cable television. (1988, p. 47)

While conceding that a few 'eccentric' films 'have used genre in order to talk about the local, the regional and the culturally specific, without seeming too baldly to do so (*Palm Beach, Heatwave, Puberty Blues, Goodbye Paradise, Star Stuck*)', the main thrust of their argument maintains that only 'home-grown' genres, such as Australian Gothic, display 'sensitivity to local inflections' (1988, p. 47). But some genre films dismissed as 'cinematically illiterate' and 'cold-hearted' (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 47) 'can dramatise the mythologies and ... meet the psychic needs of Australians' (McFarlane & Mayer, 1992, p. 4), as the following analysis of *Howling III* will show.

The opening sequence of the film features a segment of black and white footage in the style of early Australian anthropological documentary. Sub-titled 'Australia 1905, Cape York', it depicts the end of an indigenous ritual with tribesmen standing around a dead wolf-like figure tied to a tree. The image then turns to colour, suggesting the survival of the practice in the present day. Some moments later, we see a longer version of the footage, without the colouration, showing the tribesmen spearing the figure as they dance around it, when Professor Harry Beckmeyer shows the clip in a lecture he is giving to his anthropology students in Los Angeles. He explains that it was filmed by his grandfather, who subsequently 'disappeared in the outback without a trace', and that the importance of the document lies in the 'wolf-mask': 'it is so realistic we don't know how they created it' (*Appendix: compilation XCIX.*). Meanwhile, the American National Intelligence Agency has intercepted KGB transmissions about werewolf sightings and killings in Russia and so Beckmeyer, a specialist in werewolves as well as an eminent anthropologist, is called-in to break the news to the President and lead the investigation.

The theme of 'contact' prevalent in Australian horror is firmly established at the beginning of *Howling III* through the depiction of historical cultural contact with an indigenous Australian tribe. Introductions to more complex contact-related sub-themes are also evident. Morris identifies these sub-themes 'as tensions between memory and history, personal and public time, repetition and singularity, entropy and dynamism, banal and unprecedented events' (1998, p. 242). In the Australian context, narratives of contact explore the anxieties arising from the non-indigenous experience of the sublime. Consequently, the dichotomies apparent in the matrix of anxiety describe the oppositional forces at work in the maintenance of the status quo within the human/landscape relationship; and in finding the balance necessary for survival between stasis and progress.

The screening of Beckmeyer's documentary footage introduces the dualisms of memory and history, and personal and public time. The documentary is a record of history bringing the personal practices of the tribe into the public conscious. Beckmeyer's memories of his grandfather also function on the personal level and his analysis of the footage for the class, as an extinct ritual involving a woman in a wolf-mask, poses the broader question of the role of memory or personal history in the schema of public or official history. The ensuing plot, of course, revolves around the disproof of the wolf-mask interpretation through individual testimony and direct experience, but we also learn that Beckmeyer himself privately believes in the existence of werewolves; however, this is not knowledge suitable for dissemination into the public arena. The pattern of repetition and singularity is evident in the reappearance of the werewolf phenomenon, while the reactions of the men at the American National Intelligence Agency exhibit both entropy and dynamism as the information they receive is interpreted variously as either

banal or unprecedented. Personal history and public history are also juxtaposed when Beckmeyer visits the US President to discuss the situation. Old acquaintances, the meeting takes place in the President's home where the President, dressed banally in a bathrobe, is filming all his interactions 'for future generations'. Along with the use of documentary footage, the sub-themes identified in *Howling III* recall Mora's previous preoccupations in *Swastika* and *Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?* (Appendix: compilation C).

The narrative then moves to Australia. Beckmeyer returns to Sydney to engage his old friend and colleague, the skeptical Professor Sharp, in the investigation and the main were-thylacine character is introduced. Jerboa is a young woman about to run away to Sydney from her home in the isolation of the bush. The portrayal of Jerboa's family as a degenerate white tribe, living in medieval squalor in a primitive camp complete with human skull totems accords with the grotesque aesthetic identified as one stylistic articulation of the Australian Gothic mode. Depictions of freakish or mutant characters are common in narratives of isolation in which the index of difference signified by the bush is extended to extremes and 'the normal is revealed as having a stubborn bias towards the perverse, the grotesque, the malevolent' (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 51). Similar representations appear in *The Cars That Ate Paris*, the *Mad Max* trilogy and *Welcome to Woop Woop*. Dermody and Jacka observe that the grotesque physical appearance of these characters functions as an immediate indicator of pathology, replacing exposition of any particular social or psychological motivations for their actions (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 51).

The initial introduction to Jerboa's family follows this trend. The tribal leader, Thylo, is also her stepfather and Jerboa is commanded to show him respect even though he has attempted to rape her. Thylo is played by Max Fairchild, an actor long associated with malevolent roles such as a prisoner in *Mad Dog Morgan* and a bandit gang member in all three of the *Mad Max* films. His distinctive facial features alone suggest malice, but for an audience familiar with his previous work, the additional connotations surrounding his presence invite a deeper sense of malfeasance (*Appendix: excerpt CI.*). Characterisations in traditional werewolf horror films are, arguably, necessarily pathological. However, as the narrative unfolds, *Howling III* deviates from convention by outlining the history of political pressures leading to the social and psychological status of the were-thylacine tribe in the present day. As Olga, the Russian were-thylacine exclaims: 'You've been killing us for thousands of years - what choice do we have?' Of greater significance than a failure to meet the generic expectations disappointing to commentators as mentioned above, this deviation signals a differentiation in the film's intent, for *Howling III* can be read as an allegory of social injustice in general, and comment on the Aboriginal situation in particular.

Having survived her first night in Sydney on a park bench, efficiently repelling the advances of two drunks with a quick were-snarl under the full moon, Jerboa is spotted by assistant director Donny Martin and hired to act in *Shape Shifters Part 8*. The first of two film-within-the-film scenarios, the overtly comedic intention apparent in the *mise-en-scène* of the *Shape Shifters*' set foregrounds the question hanging over *Howling III*'s parodist intent. Marking a distinction between parody and satire is useful here. If the comic effect of parody is understood to work through the imitation of stereotypical

artistic styles and that of satire to eventuate from the invention of a fictitious situation for the purpose of ridicule, then *Howling III* possesses elements of both comedic styles. Parody tempers the main narrative, persistently subverting the film's political message. The target is not restricted to the horror or werewolf genre, for as Joshua Smith comments, in a review notable for placing the film within an Australian film industry context, *Howling III* exhibits a 'veritable collage of film clichés' and 'references to films as diverse as *The Fly* (1986), *The Beast Within* (1982, also directed by Philippe Mora), *Mad Max II* (1981) ... *Citizen Kane* (1941) ... *Alien* (1979) ... [and] *Bliss* (1985)' (Smith, 1998, ¶3). The production of *Shape Shifters Part 8*, and the second film-within-the-film, *It Came From Uranus*, screened when Donny takes Jerboa to see her first horror movie, provide the satirical content.

The satire effecting 'scathing self-reflexivity' and commentary on 'the direct-to-video horror market' (Smith, 1998, ¶3) is confined to the film-within-the-film sequences. Played by Frank Thring, with a 'persona ... clearly modelled after that of Alfred Hitchcock' (Smith, 1998, ¶3), the surname of *Shape Shifters*' director, Citron, means 'lemon' in French. When he interviews Jerboa for her part, Citron explains:

You know, this movie's about pop-culture. In the
'60s Andy Warhol showed us how pop could be high art.
In fact, everything is high art - that's what this
is all about.

The overtly camp pomposity of Citron's characterisation, together with the context of his delivery, ensures that the message reads as firmly tongue-in-cheek. Yet, removed from the film's diegesis and considered against the backdrop of Mora's track record in generic experimentation, the comment can be read as self-reflexive, with Mora suggesting not so

much that his film is high art, but that pop culture can harbour serious intent as readily as any other cultural form. In the *It Came From Uranus* segment, the satirical target is the American brand of werewolf film, particularly its use of shoddy transformational special effects and its 'tendency for climatic "overkill"' (Smith, 1998, ¶4) (*Appendix: compilation CII*).

Mora's parody of the genre's iconography is also self-reflexive. The song *Bad Moon Rising* - with the lyrics: 'I see a bad moon rising, I see trouble on the way' - plays non-diegetically, and an oversized full moon features in the night sky, as the postcoital Donny and Jerboa lie in bed discussing the difference between werewolf reality and fiction. Jerboa says, 'It's not the full moon that turns you into ... that makes you wild. The moon doesn't do it'; to which Donny replies: 'It's always like that in the movies.' Jerboa's status as a were-thylacine is revealed in this sequence as Donny's curiosity leads him to discover her marsupial pouch. Although she has already told Donny that she is a werewolf and given him a playful bite for good measure, within the traditional conventions of the genre, the light-hearted tone of Jerboa's revelation would foreshadow a climactic horror-reaction. But Donny calmly traces the margins of the pouch on Jerboa's hirsute abdomen in a manner more loving than fearful. He does wear an expression of concern for a few beats, but soon closes his eyes and falls into untroubled sleep just as Jerboa begins to writhe with torturous nightmares. On one level, the treatment of this scene functions as parodist commentary on generic over-reaction through opposition. On another level, the transposition of emotion from Donny to Jerboa signals the development of the film's implicit meaning. The choice of female werewolf

protagonists (Olga is introduced at a later point in the narrative) allows Mora to pursue the Australian inflected themes prevalent in Australian action and horror films identified by Morris (1998) (*Appendix: excerpt CIII*).

In the Australian context, allegories of contact can be interpreted as mythic narratives which work to transform or reconcile the cultural contradictions (Molloy, 1990a) resulting from the problematics of white Australian beginnings. This theme is explored in more detail in the second half of *Howling III*. In the first half of the film, the relationship between Jerboa and Donny introduces themes of breeding, race and miscegenation. According to Morris, action cinema of the 1970s and 1980s, and by extension, horror cinema, displays:

a double reworking of, on the one hand, the thematics of the colonial natural sublime (deadly space, isolation, 'nothing') with, on the other, that peculiar dread of the future as the outcome of an inner decay already menacing the 'race' that has haunted social Darwinist narratives since the later nineteenth century (see Beale, 1910). (Morris, 1998. p. 245. Original emphasis)

Morris maintains that ideology from the time of federation continues to echo in modern narratives of identity:

it is hard to exaggerate the influence of the twin scenarios of 'race suicide'- that is, miscegenation between 'fit' and 'unfit' persons and classes as well as races (Finch, 1993; Hicks, 1978) and '*white peril*'- falling birth rates among white Australians, compared with the 'sheer terrifying numberlessness' (Barrell, 1991:5) of the populations of a deliriously totalised 'Asia' (Brawley, 1995; Pringle, 1973). (Morris, 1998, p. 245. Original emphasis)

Despite the lack of discussion, the themes which consequently ‘fascinated filmmakers creating a new national cinema in Australia’ during the Revival and beyond - ‘bizarre, apocalyptic scenarios, obsessed with ‘breeding’ and ‘degeneracy’ (Morris, 1998, p. 245) - are clearly evident in *Howling III*.

Jerboa’s sexual appetite, already established as healthy (‘Make love to me again, Donny’), takes on a desperate quality at the *Shape Shifters*’ wrap-party. As the strobe-lighting initiates the process of her transformation into a were-thylacine, she commands Donny to ‘love me now!’ and they have sex in a corridor. Jerboa then runs off into the night with Donny in pursuit, and is knocked down by a car. Admitted to hospital, the doctors discover Jerboa’s ‘extraordinary anatomy’ and the werewolf experts, Sharp and Beckmeyer, are called in. Examining her ‘quite beautiful’ pouch, the doctors surmise she is pregnant. With ‘massive hormonal activity’ and a metabolism five times faster than normal, the inference is that the impetus behind Jerboa’s sexual urgency was the need to conceive. Throughout the film, Jerboa’s animality, as opposed to her monstrosity, is emphasised. This inflection arises from, and highlights, Mora’s empathetic approach to the werewolf theme. On first meeting Donny in the park, Jerboa is cornered like a defenceless animal in her attempt to run away from him. On the set of *Shape Shifters* Citron exclaims, ‘I think I can smell a talent here!’ before asking Jerboa if she can ‘act like an animal’: in the hospital appreciation of her exotic animality overrides fear of her monstrosity (*Appendix: compilation CIV*).

Lying unconscious while being examined in the hospital, Jerboa has a nightmare. In a sequence reminiscent of *Alien* (1979, Dir. Ridley Scott), a human-baby-sized head erupts screaming from her pouch, revealing a mouth full of fang-like teeth. This is a nightmare of miscegenation and mutation, but from the marsupial viewpoint. When Jerboa does give birth, it is to a blind, suitably tiny creature which crawls into her pouch pretty much in the usual marsupial manner. Beckmeyer's dialogue, as he tries to come to terms with the implications of 'the greatest scientific discovery of all time', evokes parallel dialogues imagined from the time of first white contact with Aborigines: 'a new species of human' ... 'a live alien species' ... 'a marsupial human that has evolved in secrecy, simultaneously with our own species' (*Appendix: compilation CV*).

Two plot developments change the explicit tone of the film from that of utopian optimism to adversative complexity. While in hospital, Jerboa is abducted by a trio of female werethylacines from her home, who leave a trail of dead human bodies in the process. Olga, a Russian werewolf ballerina who has defected to Australia, is then added into the mix. Spotted by Sharp and Beckmeyer at a rehearsal, she too ends up in hospital for observation after her pirouettes bring on an unfortunately-timed transformation. Another human death occurs as she makes her escape, but as with Jerboa, Olga's portrayal is one of essential blamelessness. Olga's manager, also a werewolf, attempts to save her while in werewolf form. A detective shoots him dead. Olga attacks the detective and the following image is of a screaming man falling from the considerable height of the hospital-room window. So, not only is the attack one of retaliation, if not self-defence, for Olga could well be next, but it remains unclear if the detective was pushed or thrown out

of the window, or if he fell against it accidentally in the struggle, or if he jumped out of sheer terror.

The abduction and the killings prompt Beckmeyer, Sharp, Donny, the police and the army to go in search of the werewolves in the bush, all for their differing reasons. The theme of first contact continues to resonate, but in parallel with the plot, it is no longer one of innocent in flavour: 'the killings have turned this into something different'. Beckmeyer seeks assurance from the army generals that casualties will be minimised in the dawn raid they plan on the werewolf camp, but he finds himself alone in his empathy: 'Don't get emotional, Beckmeyer. Too many people have died already'. Beckmeyer's reply resonates with the plight of the Aborigines: 'But how many of them have we killed over the years? They're nearly extinct!'. Captured once again, Olga expresses the victims' point of view: 'We kill to protect ourselves. You have been killing us for thousands of years – what choice do we have? We are human like you! All you know [is how to] destroy and maim – you are pigs!'

Other references to Aboriginality include the anthropological documentary footage, the social-structure, dwelling-place and rituals of Jerboa's family, and the were-thylacine paintings in the cave where Jerboa first introduces Donny to his new son. Typical to his style, Mora temporarily skews the interpretation of the narrative as a simple allegory of Aboriginal fate by adding the character of Kendi, played by Aboriginal activist Burnham Burnham. Kendi is an Aboriginal elder living in Flow, Jerboa's seemingly-deserted purported home-town, who claims to have no time for the 'wolf-men' as, 'they're bloody

evil, mate'. Later, it transpires that he too is a were-thylacine protecting his fellow tribespeople (*Appendix: compilation CVI*).

The Tasmania tiger or thylacine connection is not suggested until Jerboa undresses to give birth and the stripes on her back are briefly revealed for the first time. When Thylo is captured and forced into a transformation then tranquilized, Sharp and Beckmeyer recognise the markings. Under hypnosis, Thylo is shown a photograph of the extinct animal and his description of his relationship to it resembles the form of Aboriginal dreamtimes myths:

We were born from him. He's the phantom; he's the
lion, the tiger, the hyena and the wolf. When the
hunters killed him his spirit came into us. He's in
us now. We are him.

Genuine documentary footage from 1933 of the last remaining thylacine is shown as Beckmeyer and Sharp recount the known reasons for its demise. When they next meet with the army generals they learn that the British under Queen Victoria, aware of the half-human half-thylacine species, deliberately sought to wipe them out. And having found some of the were-species to be extant, that is what the world leaders intend to do again. Mora's use of the thylacine motif as an expression of persecution and extinction is familiar from *Mad Dog Morgan*. In *Howling III* the fate of the thylacine is also a representation of genocide (*Appendix: compilation CVII*).

Olga and Thylo's accounts of their predicament foreground themes of isolation, entropy and miscegenation, as well as those of persecution and extinction. Both come from tribes so isolated and insular that 'fresh blood' is needed to ensure the continuation of the

species. So desperate is the situation that both are willing to reproduce with an 'other', for the Russian Olga is a *werewolf*. Olga even sees advantages in the reproductive differences which distinguish the marsupial from the mammal, believing that the extra protection afforded to marsupial young hidden in the pouch gives the offspring a small - but vital - chance of survival independently of the mother, should she be killed. Regarded in the light of this history, even Thylo appears a more sympathetic character; his menace is revealed as concealed imbecility resulting from inbreeding and even his attempted rape of Jerboa, while not forgivable, at least becomes understandable in the circumstances. By providing these expositions of social and psychological motivations, *Howling III* not only deviates from the traditional conventions of the werewolf narrative, but also from the tendency for the physically grotesque to function as the sole signifier of pathology, as Dermody and Jacka contend.

The experimentation undergone by Thylo and Olga in the name of science resonates with human cruelty towards both other humans and animals. A more direct comment on animal cruelty for scientific purposes is made when Beckmeyer releases the pair from an oversized laboratory cage. The agitation of the screaming monkey at the bars of the adjoining cage is a physical articulation of Olga's earlier plea: 'Help us to get our freedom!' The screaming monkey features again as the generals inspect the scene of the breakout with Sharp. A shot of the suddenly silent monkey fills the frame, seemingly attentive to the discussion of Beckmeyer's fate. As one of the generals announces that they going to give Beckmeyer 'a pain in the ass' by sending in the 'Omega Team', the

monkey resumes screaming in concert with Sharp's deadpan response of, 'Isn't that overkill?' (*Appendix: compilation CVIII*).

The ensuing chase of the thylacines and their human sympathisers in the bush, which also involves an Aboriginal tracker, all takes place in broad daylight. The lack of traditional 'night-terror' in the film is a salient criticism levelled at *Howling III* by werewolf genre commentators. Considered within an Australian representational context, however, the portrayal of horror in full sunlight is an expression of the environmental sublime, itself an aesthetic recognised as a code in the Australian Gothic genre (Dermody & Jacka, 1988; Hood, 1994; Morris, 1998; Rayner, 2000). It is an aesthetic in which the everyday material world does not need to be cloaked in darkness to be *made* unknown – it already *is* unknown. Encounters with the unimaginable and the indescribable arise from simply being in the landscape. As Beckmeyer remarks to the US President before returning to Australia, 'they have all sorts of natural freaks down there': Australia itself is supernatural.

That light and dark play no part in the Australian index of horror is illustrated in the film in the sequence where two Australian policemen find a paw print in a quarry. One thinks it might be that of a werewolf, but the other says, 'it could be anything', then jokes that it belongs to a 'large wombat. You know, the one with big wings'. This characteristically Australian use of humour points to the fear lying just beneath the surface; the fear of the flora and fauna, what it might be, and what it might do (*Appendix: excerpt CIX*). This 'powerful *cultural* memory' of 'terror in the bush' (Morris, 1998, p. 248. Original

emphasis) is again recalled when the jittery hunters shoot towards a rustle in the undergrowth, only to find they have killed a kangaroo. The were-thylacines are not afraid of their immediate surroundings. This is not because of their special powers or their animality, but because as half thylacine they are indigenous. This distinction is implied when Olga is told she cannot stay alone in the bush; as a non-indigenous werewolf, she does not possess the skills to survive. The quality of were-thylacine fear is closer to that of European fear than white Australian fear, as it expresses the universal fear of 'unknown spheres and powers'; an instinctual 'cosmic awe' which coincides with religious experience and practice (Lovecraft cited in Carroll, 1990, pp. 161-163).

First Kendi, then Thylo, invoke 'the phantom' - the spirit of their primogenitor, the first man to fall in love and breed with a thylacine - so that they can transform into the most powerful configuration of their essence, resist the government forces, and save their tribe. The Aboriginal references take on a new strength at this point. In both cases, the invocation rituals reflect Aboriginal practice in the use of body-paint, chant and dance, all non-diegetically underscored by the sound of a didgeridoo. The character of Kendi *is* an Aborigine of course, and played by an Aborigine, but the film succeeds in effecting a sufficiently serious tone here to avoid the awkwardness of an Aborigine parodying his own cultural practice. The Aboriginal inflection given to the were-thylacines' spirituality in the film draws a connection between the indigenous Australian and the animism of the Palaeolithic era which gave rise to the Indo-European werewolf myth. It is only the white Australian who is excluded from this matrix (*Appendix: compilation CX*).

The overriding theme of the film could be interpreted as an optimistic allegory of contact, promoting the possibility of interracial harmony. Jerboa's choice of a barn for the birth of her child can be read as an instinctual compromise between the oppositional forces of the nature/culture dichotomy she embodies: the animal inclination to give birth in the bush, and the human desire to do so under constructed shelter. However, the location of birthing sequence also connotes the mythology of the Virgin Birth, with the lighting and non-diegetic music subtly suggesting that the future of the human race lies in this new half-human half-were-thylacine. Beckmeyer marries Olga: they have a daughter, and live an idyllic hippy-like existence in a small house in the bush for a couple of decades. Learning of a world-wide werewolf amnesty, Beckmeyer eventually returns, with Olga, to California and his old job as a lecturer in anthropology. Donny and Jerboa tire of the bush after a few years, change their identities and move to California with their son where they continue in the movie business - Jerboa as an actress and Donny as a director. It is these relational combinations - Australian human with Russian werewolf; Australian were-thylacine with American human - which ultimately prevent the film from being an optimistic allegory of Australian contact or belonging. For this to be the case, Beckmeyer would have had to have been paired with Jerboa, as then their offspring would have been both white Australian *and* indigenous. As Morris observes: 'Optimistic contact allegories are rare in Australian cinema' (Morris, 1998, p. 245). In *Howling III*, Mora manages to stay within the Australian narrative tradition by framing the pessimistic implications specific to the local within the optimistic implications for the global.

The essentially Australian quality of the horror in *The Howling III* also answers the critics' complaints about the lack of explicit gore in the film. The film's mode parallels the way in which 'the sublime displaces the often bloody human conflicts of colonial history with a pale metaphysics of landscape in which Man confronts the Unknown' (Otto, 1993: 549, cited in Morris, 1998, p. 243). Mora himself says of the film: '*Howling III* was, within its modest ambitions, exactly as I set out to make it' (Foreman, 2001, ¶17). The film may 'have no internal rhythm' (Harrington, 1987, ¶7) and the story may not be 'as important as some of the individual scenes' (Canby, 1987, ¶4), but in its use of social polemic, fantasy and allegory, *Howling III* conforms to Rayner's definition of rural Gothic (2000, p. 29), and it carries themes and representations deserving of at least a mention in the dialectic of Australian cinema.

Razorback (1984), directed by Russell Mulcahy, has also suffered from the stigma of being regarded as an American-style genre film, though not to the same extent as *Howling III*. In dominant Australian national cinema discourse, *Razorback* is marginalised to industry analysis (see Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 230; Rayner, 2000, p. 168) or briefly noted for its allusion to the 1980 disappearance of Azaria Chamberlain, and her mother's defence that a dingo took the baby (see Barlow, 1995, p. 151; Mayer, 1999, p. 403). As in *Howling III*, the American characters and settings - which supplement the American moniker for a wild boar used as the title in a bid for international appeal - fall victim to the film's satirical mode along with animal-rights campaigners. Another horror-genre parody, Mulcahy's previous work as a music-video director is evident in *Razorback*'s surrealistic stylisation. Describing the film as 'video-

clip horror', Barlow's observation that '*Razorback*'s outrageous visual style is probably more accessible now than when it was made' (1995, p. 151) still holds true more than a decade later.

Commentators recognise the mode and style of rural Australian Gothic horror in the characterisations of Benny and Dicko and the *mise-en-scène* of their work and home surroundings, but fail to note the same inflections in either the representation of the landscape, or the explicit and implicit themes conveyed in the narrative. For Dermody and Jacka:

Benny and Dicko are two caricatured porcine males whose kangaroo-pet-food factory, a foul, marvellous, Dickensian place of carcasses and steam, is the prime symbol of the fallen state of man and his rapaciousness ... The scenes between Benny and Dicko remain as if part of another, more interesting, film of pure Australian Gothic, with wit and deliberate grotesquerie. (1988, p. 230)

The Australian inflections present in Dean Semler's cinematography are recognised by Barlow, yet she fails to identify the portrayals of the sublime inherent in the representations. Accordingly, she comments:

Though Mulcahy's dark post-apocalyptic vision does employ real Australian elements, a kind of hyper-reality, the outback, looms large and untameable, with florid sunsets, barren salt plains, dust storms, barbed wire, gnarled branches – and exaggerated pig noises' (Barlow, 1995, p. 151. Emphasis added)

Mulcahy's 'highly stylised' (Mayer, 1999, p. 403) abstracted style also confounds Dermody and Jacka: 'An obscure smoke drifts across every frame with no apparent source (probably traceable to its real origins in Mulcahy's rock clips)' (1988, p. 230).

The full extent of the specifically Australian themes and representations articulated in *Razorback* become apparent when both the nature of the eponymous monster and the narrative are examined more closely. In the small outback town of Gamulla, a young boy disappears, allegedly abducted by a wild boar. Tried and acquitted of his grandson's murder, Jake Cullen dedicates his life to hunting the beast down. Two years later, New York-based animal activist and journalist, Beth Winters, arrives in town to report on the exploitation of kangaroos for the pet-food trade. She too disappears mysteriously, so her husband Carl travels to Gamulla to investigate.

As mentioned above, *Razorback* is the only monster-centric Australian contribution to the zoo-horror or 'revenge-of-the-animals cycle' (Mayer, 1999, p. 403) which followed the success of Spielberg's *Jaws* in 1975. Andrew Tudor frames this cycle as the 'eco-doom' genre in which the prevalence of animal monsters or 'natural nasties' reflect the increasing awareness of ecological concerns and fears of ecological catastrophe (Tudor, 1989, pp. 48-62). Aaltola points out that animal rights and animal welfare issues are also related themes:

All of a sudden the superior status of humans was being critically examined, and animal monsters were one way to deal with the fear of losing the old safe position. Tudor points out that at the same time also paranoia and helplessness were being emphasized: it was in the presumably safe environment that monsters all of a sudden emerged from, and the heroes were no longer quite as

strong in protecting the society against them. This could be linked to the awareness of environmental and animal welfare issues; it was the supposedly controlled area that was attacking humanity. (Aaltola, 2002, ¶3)

In the Australian context, ambiguity surrounds the issue of environmental control and it is the choice of animal to represent the monstrous that is significant in *Razorback*. The animal is not indigenous but feral, descended from escapee domestic pigs introduced to Australia with European settlement (Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2004). Home to the widest variety of dangerous species of animals and insects in the world, including ten of the most venomous snakes and four of the top six animals categorised globally as ‘most dangerous’ – viz: the Great White Shark (No. 6), the Box Jellyfish (No.5), the Saltwater Crocodile (No.4) and the Funnel Web Spider (No.2) (Animals & Wildlife, 2006) – Australia has no shortage of indigenous animal subjects to choose to demonise. The shark of *Jaws* is a monstrous representation of the species, but it is identified as a Great White, indigenous to the New England setting of the film.

Considered within Wood’s theory that ‘the true subject of the horror genre is all that our civilization represses or oppresses’ (Wood, 1986, p. 75), the articulation of the monstrous through the feral pig points to a doubled-layered repression. In *Razorback*, the omnipresent indigenous horrors of the bush are sublimated into a Eurocentric anxiety; an anxiety which, if not most directly familiar to white Australian cultural memory, more readily resonates on the unconsciousness level. The overwhelming anxiety of the

unknowable and indescribable is replaced by the relatively less terrifying dread of the conceivable.

The pertinent distinction here is that between the metaphorical embodiment of culturally surmounted beliefs and the way in which the embodiment itself 'is invested in cultural relevance' (Schneider, 1999, Introduction: Horror film monsters, ¶7). The quality of the 'uncanny' identified by Freud to be the instigator of 'dread and horror' (Freud, 1990/1919, p. 339), as presented by the Australian environment to white Australians, remains amorphous in the indeterminability of its manifestations. Arguably, it is the expression of this amorphous mode of horrorality - in the style of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* or *Long Weekend* (see chapter 5), for example - implicit in the construction of the Australian Gothic horror mode, which precludes films such as *Howling III* and *Razorback* from substantive inclusion in the cultural discourse. Both films confront the Australian Gothic horror paradigm by offering concrete manifestations of the monstrous and they have been mistakenly marginalised as exploitative examples of fundamentally non-Australian articulations of the genre (see Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 47) for doing so. *Howling III* and *Razorback* are notable in their efforts to translate white Australian angst into culturally relevant corporeal entities. Regardless of whether the films ultimately succeed in horrifying the audience, their approach not only reprises many of the themes traditionally associated with Australian representation, but also brings previously latent themes to the fore.

The choice of animals employed in human self-other distinctions is culturally bound. As identity is socially constructed, so each culture will select an opposite 'other' on a moral

basis (Ingold, 1994). The example of the feral pig embodies European Australian cultural attitudes towards both domestication and the wilderness. Domestication is an 'interspecies association' which displays an 'intriguing mix of human impulses' involving economic, ecological and cultural factors (Anderson, 1998, *Animal domestication: Comments from the urban zoo*, ¶4). The ruling metaphor ordering the conceptual framework of human-animal relations in the domestic domain is that of 'kinship' (Sabloff, 1991, cited in Quinn, ¶3). In contrast to the wild animal human-animal kinship of hunter-gatherer cultures, such as that of the Aboriginal for example, for pastoral and agriculturally-based societies this relationship is confined to, and defined by, breeding (Quinn, 1993). Quinn argues that the concept of domestic breeds is best described through the 'animal-as-artifact metaphor' for:

Although breeds are characterized by unique physical and behavioral characteristics, the notion of breeds exists primarily as a social construct ... created by humans for aesthetic, economic or ritual reasons through selective breeding practices based on a conception of how the perfect animal should look and act or perform. (1993, ¶7)

While the origins and initial purposes of animal domestication remain debatable (Anderson, 1998), in the broad metaphorical sense, the practice holds notions of acculturation, distinguishing the civilized from 'the savage': 'the native peoples [who] have never attained the stage of culture in which men become inclined to subjugate wild animals' (Shaler, 1896, p. 247, cited in Anderson, 1998, *Cultural geography and domestication*, ¶1). Domestication and breeding can also be regarded as a protective exercise; an expression of demarcation and control between 'civility and wilderness, both

in thought and practice' (Anderson, 1998, *Domesticating the wild: A narrative triumph*, ¶3). These connotations resonate strongly with colonial Australian concerns, but Anderson's interpretation of the more recent work of cultural geography theorist Rodrigue, suggests an even stronger ideological connection. According to Anderson, Rodrigue significantly links domestication, and the animal-as-artifact, to environmental conditions and existential anxieties by positing that "“fragile, destabilizing human ecosystems” impelled decisions to elevate long-domesticated stock into spiritual herds' (Rodrigue, 1992, p. 428 cited in Anderson, 1998, *A new look at animal domestication*, ¶1).

A multilayered, specifically Australian, representation of monstrosity lies beneath the generic superstructure of *Razorback*. On the generic level, the representations in *Razorback* can be neatly outlined within the rhetorics of eco-doom and animal welfare, but such interpretations obscure the film's deeper relevancy. Figuratively, the feral pig speaks most eloquently to, or of, post-colonial manifestations of lingering colonial anxieties. This animal symbolises the complexities of the alienation theme characteristic of Australian horror, with allusions to loss, miscegenation and breeding. However, the implicit and depicted transgressions are not simply those of nature itself, but of a previously established relationship with nature that has been recently lost. In *Razorback*, the loss of the child to a sublime force of nature is compounded by the loss of control over a species which had previously been not only necessary to survival in an unknown environment, but also functioned as a marker of culture: as an artifact expressing the imported ethos of civility separating the settlers from the wilderness beyond. The animal once fed, protected and bounded by white culture has ventured into the alien landscape and thrived in a manner denied to the humans. In addition, it has perverted the principles

of the previous association by breaking through the boundaries a second time, boundaries now erected as protection against the animal, to feed off its former guardians.

Comparison of the treatment of the animal-human abduction theme in *Razorback* and *Evil Angels* highlights the differing connotations attached to the indigenously wild animal and the feral. Of course, the dingo of *Evil Angels* can also be regarded as feral, having been introduced to the continent by Austronesian traders around 3000 BC, but the white Australian conception of the animal is indigenous. In *Evil Angels*, as in the actual Chamberlain trial, the outcome of the case rests on the place of the dingo within the Australian consciousness. The question is not whether a mother would kill her baby but whether a dingo would kill a baby. Comparing dingoes with crocodiles, in the film, the prosecution sums up by claiming: 'Our experience as Australians tells us that the dingo does not bear such a reputation'. When knowable - through reputation if not through direct experience - the qualities of the wild animal are immutable: an existential constant like the uncultivated landscape itself.

The once known, humanly-selected qualities of the domesticated pig, however, are lost once the animal re-enters the wild. In *Razorback*, the characterisation of the feral boar's monstrosity is tempered by the exposition of possible environmental causes to explain the animal's aberrant behaviour. The role of grand-father Jake is that of the 'go-between' in the 'contact' inflected narrative which comprises the first part of the film. Morris's observations on the narrative function of the go-between applies to *Razorback* and its 'rhetorics of contact', in which:

problems of control and mastery may be most acutely posed not by 'aliens', but by the go-betweens (Chambers, 1994) or *carriers* who exemplify contact between inner and outer worlds. (Morris, 1998b, p. 246. Original emphasis)

During his trial for the alleged murder of his grandson, the prosecution focuses on the fact that no-one else has encountered the beast which Jake claims is 'four or five times bigger' than anything ever 'seen or heard of'. For Jake, razorbacks are 'vicious, shit-eating, godless vermin' and 'God and the devil couldn't have created a more despicable species'. Guiding Carl through his trophy-room of mounted boar-heads he explains:

You see this fella - I blew half his hind-quarters away with a .30-30 and he still kept coming. The concussion alone is enough to knock most animals rotten, but your razorback is different. He doesn't have a nervous system like most animals. He only has two states of being; dangerous or dead - nothing in between.

Jake's viewpoint articulates the broad contact-narrative theme of the unnatural or supernatural, while his role as avenging hunter explores the issues of control and mastery at play within the inside/outside, domesticated/feral dichotomies inherent in the plot. His commentary also alludes to the themes of breeding and miscegenation. No longer guided and controlled by the human-hand, the implication is that the feral pig is monstrous not because it has bred with a different species, but because in its wild state it has bred indiscriminately with other breeds of the same species. Under domestication, these breeds are distinguished by their differing qualities, but they have all been selected for possessing desirable physical and behavioural characteristics of one sort or another. With

the razorback, the mingling of breeds in the entropy of the wild state has resulted in something beyond the undesirable: an animal barely recognisable, biologically, as such. The portrayal of the razorback as a mammal with an unnatural nervous system echoes the kinship metaphor of domestication. A 'natural' or naturalised bond has been broken and the only acceptable explanation is that the animal fails to recognise the traditional association because it can longer 'feel' in the same way.

The viewpoint presented through the role of farmer and ecologist Sarah Cameron articulates the contact-narrative theme of population by providing insight into the possible mitigating circumstances behind the feral pigs' behaviour. Sarah, who has been tracking and studying the animals, explains to Carl that:

They don't usually come in that close [but suddenly] these boars are eating us out of house and home ... A lot of them are diseased. They've got worms and parasites and stuff and the sicker they get the hungrier they become.

This portrayal of the feral pigs' existence as liminal can be read as a circumscribing allegory of white Australian existentialism angst, with particular emphasis on the tensions between entropy and dynamism (Morris, 1998, p. 242). Having dared to venture into the wild and proliferate for a time, the pigs find that ultimately they cannot survive in the natural environment and they are forced to return to the transplanted ecosystem of their former existence. Yet they must return as 'raiders', not only disenfranchised, but outlawed for leaving the society to which they once belonged.

When Sarah says, 'It's really weird lately because Jake's been finding their teeth – they've been cannibalising their young', she introduces the theme of maternal negativity identified by Morris to be prominent in white Australian narrative. This 'myth of the mother-as-carrier' embodies a fear of the unknown through miscegenation as:

one can never be sure exactly what a woman is 'carrying', or whether a threat to the future of a family, community, nation, 'race' will successfully be contained Herself a go-between who bodily mediates ... inside and outside worlds, the mother can be a bearer of a 'peril' from the *past* as well as of hope or fear for the future. (Morris, 1998, p. 254. Original emphasis)

Sarah goes on to tell Carl of the 'stress-ulcer' she found in a sow she recently dissected. Suspicious of the anthropomorphic sensibility suggested by the account, Carl retorts in an incredulous tone: 'Boars worry?' 'Yeah ...', is Sarah's calm reply: 'lately something's been worrying them a lot.' As well as reprising the emotional dimension of the representation of feral pigs in the film, this exchange marks a point of differentiation between the general herd of feral pigs, and the single, monstrous boar responsible for the human abductions and deaths. Ridden by disease and starving, they may be pillaging food from the farmers, but they too are being terrorised by something more unnatural than themselves.

Beneath the justification offered by starvation lies the suggestion that the pigs are cannibalising their own pups on recognition of them as the progeny of the monstrous boar. The interpretation offered by Sarah's exposition redeems the general herd, both boars and sows alike, from the guilt of the ultimate transgression as perpetrated by the monster. The

empathic connection between the once domesticated animal and the human is thus alluded to again, this time more directly and more positively. Unlike the genetic monstrosities described by Jake, the pigs observed by Sarah not only have a nervous system, but one sensitive enough to produce the pathological symptom of an ulcer. They also recognise the monstrous mutation in their midst, and in seeking to destroy it, appear to be exhibiting vestiges of a cultural memory of their own; a memory or an intimation of behavioural codes from a previous existence. By acknowledging the overriding social tenet of domestication – ‘thou shalt not eat the hand that feeds’, if not ‘thou shalt not bite the hand that feeds’ - the actions of the general herd signify a positive suggestion: the possibility of a return to the security, however short-lived, of their traditional interspecies association.

Razorback also offers a variety of representations of the kangaroo worthy of analysis. The representational role of the kangaroo in Australian cinema is complex as they are ‘simultaneously, protected indigenous wildlife, emblem of the nation, “pest” species, export product and gourmet food’ (Thorne, 1998, Conclusion, ¶1). Not surprisingly, perhaps, the ambiguity framing the Australian relationship with the kangaroo gives rise to more controversy overseas than at home. In foreign kangaroo-advocate circles, the misbelief that Australia is the only country in which it is legal to both kill and eat the national emblem holds strong currency.

The moral outrage attaching itself to this claim is misguided on three counts. Firstly, the national emblem of France is the cockerel and *coq-au-vin* is considered to be one of its national dishes. Secondly, the coat of arms featuring the kangaroo, along with the emu,

granted by Edward III in 1908 and familiar from passports and coins and countless other symbolic manifestations, is not a national emblem (Kangaroo Newsletter Archives 8, 2006). The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade state that Australia has ‘never adopted any official motto or faunal or bird emblem’ (Australia’s Coat of Arms, 2004). Thirdly, Australians eat two, i.e. *both* of their (unofficial) national emblems - though not necessarily at the same time - the kangaroo and the emu. Discussion of the reasons behind the emu’s lesser standing in comparison to the kangaroo’s international and national profile is, unfortunately, beyond any direct relevancy to this thesis, but the phrase ‘faunal or bird emblem’, in DFAT’s statement on the official standing of the kangaroo and emu symbol, is indicative of the underlying problem. The term ‘fauna’ distinguishes *all* animals from plants or ‘flora’, whether they be mammalian or marsupial, avian or reptilian, piscine or entomic, etc... DFAT’s semantic error exposes the conceptual hierarchy at work behind existing attitudes to animals.

Given the above, the characterisation of Beth, as an American animal activist and journalist investigating the kangaroo industry, is both apt and accurate. In her first piece to camera, the introductory segment to a report she will never file, Beth announces that:

Gamulla deals literally in an economy of flesh and blood. Last year more than 800,000 kangaroos and wallabies were slaughtered in this district alone. They were summarily gutted and quartered and dumped at the PetPack cannery - eight miles west of here - to become dog excreta on the sidewalks of Sydney, Hong Kong and New York ...

The information imparted here is realistic. The national kangaroo-harvesting quota listed for New South Wales in 1982 and 1983 was 843,000 per annum and the bulk of kangaroo

meat is still exported as pet food (Commercial Kangaroo Harvest Quotas, 2004; Ramsay, 1994). This adherence to the factual describes the particularities of the film's satirical intent. Neither the ideology of animal-rights activists, nor the information disseminated by them is the target, but rather Beth herself.

As an early victim of the razorback, Beth's unsympathetic depiction can be read simply in terms of narrative function. In the traditional mode of the female in horror films, despite all her purported experience, extreme lack of judgment quickly leads her straight into trouble. Curiously for the mid-80s (the period of the film's release), the implication that Beth prompted the fate awaiting her - also traditional to horror - is made through the suggestion that by putting her career before her husband and her unborn child, she is undeserving of the happiness such a life could offer. In the New York sequence, husband Carl cooks dinner as Beth announces her trip to Australia. She is reluctant to go as she is pregnant and will be away for their first wedding anniversary, but she cannot let her agency down. Beth's characterisation accords with the theme of maternal negativity, of course, but the suggestion that this is because she is a feminist remains regressive for the times. The fact that Carl is a Canadian points to the film's intent to satirise American culture in the representation of Beth. Her over-confident pushiness contrasts with Sarah's practical, yet gentle, demeanor; just as Sarah's care of Carl and the piglets highlights Beth's self-absorption. True to the horror film cliché ending, Carl and Sarah finally kiss once the monster has been dispatched. Beth's body is never found, but retrieval of the ring that Carl gave her as an anniversary present, from the morass of charnel beside the razorbacks' watering-hole, serves to signify both the end of her life and the need for Carl

to remain faithful to her memory. In this manner, the union between Carl and Sarah is ‘naturalised’: there have been no transgressions and the promise is of maternal positivity.

On the explicit narrative level, the kangaroo-as-victim motif running through *Razorback* appears to be specifically devised to resonate with non-Australian audiences. On the implicit level, expressions of this very same theme connect with familiar conventions from the Australian Gothic mode, adding new twists and inflections to the Australian representational paradigm. Primarily, this mode is articulated visually. The PetPak factory, where the kangaroo meat is processed is ‘a foul, marvellous, Dickensian place of carcasses and steam’ (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 230); an architectural manifestation of ‘secret depravity’ (Rayner, 2000, p. 29). Dicko and Benny, the two brothers who run the operation, are personifications of the rural Gothic aesthetic in both their costuming and characterisation. The generic mix, identified by Dermody and Jacka as typical of the mode, is most apparent in their work-clothing and hunting-outfits, where the improvisational convergence of sartorial styles and functions, reminiscent of the costuming ethos in *Mad Max II*, serves to heighten their psychopathic rural-mutant status. As the dominant and most deranged of the two brothers, Dicko’s outfits are the most extreme, mixing goggles and aprons with improvised leggings and arm-protectors fashioned out of kangaroo skins. Denoting his impulsiveness and mental instability, the improvisational quality of Dicko’s dress is emphasised with continually changing combinations throughout the film. At times, the proportion of kangaroo-skin to cloth or flesh – he dons a whole skin over his shoulders when going hunting, then later sports a Davy Crockett-style hat – suggests a half-human, half-animal form, in a negative expression of animality.

In contrast to the function of the thylacine pelt in *Mad Dog Morgan*, Dicko's use of kangaroo-skin signifies his total lack of compassion for animals and humans alike. The pig-like squeals made by the brothers and their mates when baiting their victims operate in a similar vein, though their identification with the feral pigs links them with the razorbacks' malevolence. Despite the fact that the carcasses and offal filling the PetPack factory would seem to make it a prime target for attack by the starving razorbacks, until their final comeuppance at the end of the film, the brothers act as if they are exempt from the pigs' attentions. As if they have made some kind of Faustian pact with the animals, the brothers mock the danger posed by the 'piggy wiggies', and deny ever having experienced the razorback to be anything but a 'shy and cunning beast ... a kind of cowardly bastard' easily scared-off by 'a good boo!' (*Appendix: compilation CXI*).

When Dicko and Benny coerce Carl to join them on a midnight kangaroo hunt, their mania and cruelty is expressed first through their treatment of the kangaroo, then through their treatment of Carl. When a kangaroo is located in their spotlight, Dicko's remarks take on a languid, sexual tone: 'Beautiful ... beautiful eyes ... see how he's mesmerised to the spot'. As he aims, Dicko speaks slowly, placing emphasis on each single word – 'beautiful ... big ... brown ... eyes' - before shooting the animal. By recalling the attempted rape of Beth by the gang earlier in the film - when, having run Beth off the road in retaliation for her attempts to film the PetPack operation, Dicko approaches the car and feigns concern by asking if she is OK ('Any bones broken? Anything like that?'), before dragging her out to be assaulted ('D'you wanna make love?') - the scene highlights the perversion underlying Dicko's enthusiasm for the hunt. After the shot, a horrified Carl sees that the kangaroo is still alive, but the reply to his exclamation of 'Oh God ... God ...

it's still alive!' is nonchalant: 'Well of course it is. You don't kill it outright otherwise it'd go as stiff as jerky before you have time to butcher it'. After climbing down from the ute to vomit, Carl finishes the kill with a hatchet. In punishment for this transgression, the brothers decide that Carl should skin and gut the kangaroo. Promising to return in 'five or six hours', they leave him alone in the bush. After surviving a long cold night in the open, Carl's real nightmare begins when he encounters the razorbacks as he tries to find his way back to civilisation (*Appendix: compilation CXII*).

The kangaroo motif is reprised and developed when Carl wreaks his revenge on Dicko. Eventually cornered after a lengthy and gruesome chase-sequence in the PetPack factory, Dicko falls to his knees before Carl and his raised rifle. Adopting the posture of the animal, Dicko says 'I'm a kangaroo', then taunts with 'well, shoot me ... you finished the kangaroo off', as Carl takes aim. Carl is spared from the trauma of a second kill by the appearance of the razorback, which goes on to do the job for him. Once again, the kangaroo motif functions to articulate deviancy, this time through Dicko's mocking pretence of identification with the animal (*Appendix: excerpt CXIII*). The use of a kangaroo-hunting sequence in the depiction of deviancy is also found in *Wake a Fright* (discussed in chapter 5), a film commonly linked with *Razorback* (Dermody & Jacka, 1988; Hood, 1994) for exhibiting thematic, if not tonal, similarities. In psychological research, the correlation between hunting and crime remains contested, but theorists often intuit the relationship to be 'positively related' (Adair, 1995, ¶19), a hypothesis which echoes in lay perception. More specifically, in line with the findings in studies such as Clifton's (1994a, 1994b), 'there is a strong positive association between hunting and ... especially pedophilia, other sex crimes and family violence' (Adair, 1995, ¶4). The

hunting metaphor, therefore, resonates strongly with the rural Australian Gothic and contact-narrative themes of degeneracy and (in)breeding, and in *Razorback*, connects directly with the attempted rape of Beth by Dicko and Benny and their friends.

Animal representations are consistently employed throughout *Razorback* to indicate the rural Gothic zeitgeist. The kangaroo in the opening sequence signaling the film's tone and narrative concerns, serves to locate the setting of the film in the traditional manner. Silhouetted against images of a barbed-wired fence, the windmill central to two of the razorback-herd attack sequences, a laundry-line, a man with a rifle and a scarecrow, this initial presentation of the kangaroo foreshadows its symbolic role. Inside the barbed-wire perimeter delineating the protected area of human habitation, the positioning of the animal - along with its relaxed, grazing attitude - establishes a differentiation between the status of the kangaroo and that of the faunal generality beyond the fence. The import of this differentiation is in the kangaroo's function as an index of civility, as illustrated by the opposing human-kangaroo connections made in the characterisations of Dicko and Carl (*Appendix: excerpt CXIV*).

In *Razorback*, the kangaroo is a representational and metaphorical symbol of the ambivalences inherent in human-animal relations (Humphrey, 1995; Arluke & Sanders, 1996) as manifest in white Australian culture. This ambivalence is also evident in *Crocodile Dundee*, expressed in Dundee's attitude towards stopping the kangaroo-hunters, as discussed in chapter 3. Taking a broader, audience-focused perspective, the kangaroo also functions as a suitably versatile animal image, able to effect the identifications necessary to its role in the film for both Australian and non-Australian audiences alike.

For Australian audiences, the kangaroo may be perceived as a food source, an economic product, a pest and a legitimate hunting subject, yet the dangers it presents to the agricultural environment are more manageable than those presented by the feral pig (Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2004). The kangaroo represents the lesser of two evils. In the cultural value system of American audiences, the kangaroo is a 'good animal' (Arluke & Sanders, 1996): a cute symbol of an exotic land. Both perceptions serve the narrative intent of the film equally well.

Other animal representations are used throughout the film to underline the Gothic tone. Domesticated camels are not only part of Gamulla's street scenes but they also drink beer with their owners in the hotel bar. In the disused mine which serves as Dicko and Benny's home, the ragged form of an eagle, stuffed with its wings and claws distended in an attitude simulating a descent on prey, hangs as decoration from the ceiling. The image provides comment on the predatory nature of the brothers. Further, with its dark feathering and ragged outline, the bird not only echoes the traditional horror iconography of the crow or vulture, but in the disarray of its plumage, it also imparts the notions of destabilisation and disgust associated with the visual violation of a smooth, clearly defined body (Barthes, 1972; Baker, 1993; Scarry, 1985). The cowering, whimpering, three-legged dog chained in the brothers' den functions in the same way. The depiction of the monstrous razorback's gaping mouth in frenzied attack also draws on these associations. While its outsized tusks and fangs denote danger, the excessive flesh of its dangling mouthparts, dripping with blood and saliva, is the site of its true horror. This image compounds the disgust of excreta as bodily transgressional fluids (Douglas, 1996, p. 122) with intimations of death arising from the convergence of fluid with flesh, which

signifies the collapse of bodily integrity (Kristeva, 1992, p. 3) (*Appendix: compilation CXV*).

Before the horror of the razorback is made concrete through detailed depiction, its threat is framed within the matrix of the sublime. This is exemplified in the dialogue of Jake's trial. Jake's defence lawyer describes the animal as:

by no means a normal product of nature. Its
armour is a thick layer of bristle that can't be
penetrated by a rifle shot unless fired from
underneath it ... It's a hybrid species: a
freak, an aberration.

To which the prosecutor replies: 'Aberration or apparition?'. Later in the trial the prosecutor asks: 'Where is it? Why hasn't anyone else ever seen it?'.

Contrary to the opinion of dominant commentary as noted above, the expressionistic visual style of *Razorback* can be read as a deliberate and effective articulation of the sublime aesthetic traditional in Gothic representations of the Australian landscape, as opposed to mere cross-generic directorial self-indulgence. Particularly in the sequence in which Carl is left in the bush with the dead kangaroo, the cinematography and the soundscape work together to effect a level of abstraction that accords directly with the unknown and the indescribable. In this sequence, the 'nightmare' of the reality of Carl's situation is juxtaposed with his own internal nightmare, which comes on when, huddled-up for residual warmth to the kangaroo he has killed, he finally falls asleep.

The nightmare quality of the actual landscape - or the nightmarish quality of Carl's perception of it - is signalled by the lack of differentiation in the representational treatment of the reality and the dream. In both, the landscape is a cold, misty, ethereal blue; seemingly two-dimensional and fathomless at the same time, like a featureless sea or sky. Silhouettes and creeping shadows bisect the frame, accompanied by the dislocated squawking and screeching cries of unseen animals. This is a study of the sublime aesthetic, a cinematographic rendition of Burke's 'tranquillity shadowed with horror' (1968, p. 34 cited in Morris, 1998b, p. 247), with 'low, confused, uncertain sounds' (Burke, 1968, p. 83 cited in Morris, 1998b, p. 249), and 'a nothingness which is actually something, an immensely powerful, active force' (Thompson, 1987, p. 164 cited in Morris, 1998, p. 243) (*Appendix: excerpt CXVI*).

Howling III and *Razorback* convey many of the styles and themes central to the Australian Gothic mode and they present complex and discriminating expressions of national identity, despite their generic form. Arguably, it is *because* of their generic structure that these films are able to contain the force of their cultural representations so discreetly. Without the strength of the narrative which the conventions of their genre provide, such bold and insistent articulations would run the risk of being cinematically unpalatable.

The analyses of *Howling III* and *Razorback* above highlight the deficiency of the Australian Gothic paradigm as a self-reflexive classification. By neglecting to consider the specifics of the animal-centred representations within the films, dominant commentary intellectually repeats the omissions inherent in the sublime aesthetic: the

details of the cultural significations offered by the texts remain as either 'unseeable' or 'unknowable'. This limited perception results in interpretations which deny the texts the full force of their connotations, motifs and themes.

Both films explicitly introduce and explore the feral/indigenous dichotomy that exists in Australian representations of the environment. This dichotomy is self-evidently central to cultural landscape discourse, metonymically re-playing and exploring representations of the colonial and post-colonial, yet dominant film commentary has, so far, failed to identify it as such. Animal-centred readings uncover this dichotomy and illustrate the ways in which the ideologies at work within it are employed in representation. The analysis of *Razorback* also points to the importance of human-animal interaction in characterisation as an indicator of deviancy or psychological imbalance; a topic which is discussed further in the following chapter.

Chapter 5

Bodies, boundaries and cultural geography: animals and social transgression

In contrast to *Howling III* and *Razorback*, the films discussed in this chapter, *Wake in Fright*, *Long Weekend* and *Bad Boy Bubby*, are all recognised by the dominant commentary of Australian cinematic discourse for displaying significant characteristics of the Australian Gothic mode, both visually and thematically. The following analyses concentrate on the role played by representations of human-animal interactions in characterisation and as indicators of social or psychological deviancy, as introduced in the discussion of *Razorback* in chapter 4, while also continuing with the examination of themes of contact and miscegenation. Ultimately, this chapter aims to show how an animal-centred reading works to universalise the specific concerns of Australian identity and existence into those of humanity as a whole.

Directed by Canadian Ted Kotcheff, *Wake in Fright* (1971) explores ‘repression, violence and male self-segregation’ (Morris, 1980, p. 148) through the male rituals which the protagonist, John Grant, must endure when his plans to return to Sydney on leave from his small-town teaching post in the bush go awry, leaving him stranded in the not-much-bigger town of the `Yabba. Despite being regarded as ‘an outsider’s essay, a kind of Australian heart of darkness’ by Dermody and Jacka, (1988, p. 80), *Wake in Fright* is widely recognised as the first film to display Australian inflected horror-codes and

conventions in its treatment of the themes of repression, isolation and the abuse of nature prominent in subsequent examples of the genre. McFarlane comments on the 'remarkable fidelity' with which 'director Ted Kotcheff and scriptwriter Evan Jones have captured the tone' of Kenneth Cook's 1961 novel of the same name, on which it is based (1983, p. 23).

The night-time kangaroo-hunting sequences in *Razorback* and *Wake in Fright* make for interesting comparison, both visually and thematically. Impressionistic elements are present in the visual style of the latter, predominantly effected through the use of montage, framing and focus; but set against the extreme expressionism of *Razorback*, the cinematography of *Wake in Fright* is grounded in realism. Yet the power of the film's 'notorious' kangaroo-hunting sequence (Turner, 1986, p. 40) is such that it appears 'almost surreal' (Hood, 1994, *The 1970s Revival*, ¶1). In both films, it is the use of lighting - the extreme contrast offered by the narrow beam of the spotlight within the immensity of the darkness in particular - which creates the dramatic tension and the atmosphere of chaos. Metaphorically, the probing spotlights become weapons of invasion; indiscriminately stunning all in their path with their mesmerising, alien power. Turner observes that the 'similarity of the use of lighting on the kangaroo's terrified, and John Grant's panic-stricken, faces places them both in the role of victim' (Turner, 1986, p. 42). In *Razorback*, Carl and the kangaroo are also connected via the same technique and the same implications are evident.

In *Wake in Fright*, the connections drawn between hunting and deviancy are more subtle and complex than those apparent in *Razorback*. The differing attitudes displayed by the men towards the kangaroo-hunt reflect the particularities of their sexual expression. The

film carries strong misogynistic undertones, primarily articulated through the characterisations of Dick and Joe. Hostage to Haynes' hospitality and the inescapable trajectory of yet another drinking session, as John talks to Haynes' daughter, Janette, his separation from the male circle prompts the derision expressed by Dick: 'What's the matter with him? He'd rather talk to a woman than drink beer!' Dick's salacious invasion of Janette's personal space paints him as no respecter of female intent or desire. The portrayal of the relationship between Janette and her father carries intimations of incest. Janette's role is that of a subservient wife, silent in the background as the men drink: doing the washing-up, bringing more beers, and taking away the empties. John asks Janette why she stays in the town. When Janette deflects the question, John presses the point by asking, 'Is it because of your father?' Janette responds by slowly turning her gaze towards John and giving him a look poignant with the weight of the unspeakable before returning her attention to an imagined horizon in the darkness of outback. John acknowledges the taboo nature of the subject with a simple 'sorry', then attempts to change the mood by reciting poetry.

John and Janette's stilted conversation leads to a sexually passionless clinch in the bushes outside Haynes's house. Still wearing her perpetual expression of resigned discontent, Janette lies down in the dirt and mechanically unbuttons her shirt-dress as John looks on unmoved. She then sighs and writhes in an unconvincing imitation of sexual excitement as she tries to arouse John. Suddenly John kisses her, but he pulls away just as suddenly to vomit in the undergrowth. Seemingly unaffected by the lack of consummation and unsurprised by John's reaction, Janette's actions remain perfunctory as she re-buttons her dress and wipes John's mouth.

Janette represents the unhappy state of female existence in the bush, powerless to the whims of a drunken father as he entertains an assortment of 'mates' bonded solely by their desire to drink. The family dog, a pregnant bitch about to whelp, provides a metaphorical allusion for the nature of Janette's sexuality. On returning from their 'walk' John and Janette find the men discussing the dog and negotiating betting stakes for the time of birth. The accompanying quips centre on the sexual deviancy of bestiality. 'When is she going to whelp?', Haynes asks. 'Are you the father?', Doc replies, to which one of the men adds: 'He only does it with sheep'. When Dick - who has demonstrated a genuine interest in dog-breeding earlier in the evening while bragging about the kangaroo-hunting skills of his 'great' new dog - asks, 'Who is the father anyway?', Janette's raw reply, 'I don't know. She's a slut this bitch, she'll take anything', reads as a self-reflexive observation. The comment adds to the nuance of animality in John and Janette's coupling already presented through Janette's indifference and John's failed attempt to disconnect his emotions in order to perform the 'mating' duty expected of him, as well as reinforcing the hints of incest (*Appendix: excerpt CXVII*).

Close analysis of the representations in the two kangaroo-hunting sequences, involving Dick, Joe, John and Doc, which take place the day after the drinking session at Haynes's house, reveal thematic nuances fundamental to the film as a whole. On the first, daylight, expedition, John sits in the back of the ute with Dick and his dog, wearing a boyish expression of glee mixed with fleeting anxiety. Dick's dog is released when the first mob of kangaroos is sighted. As they follow the dog in its chase with the ute, Doc's vociferous enthusiasm matches that of Dick and Joe in frequency and volume, if not in vocabulary, as they careen through the bush. The dog downs the kangaroo, but the men leave it to its

quarry as they continue chasing the rest of the mob, then focus on a single target. The atmosphere becomes even more frenzied, and Joe's navigation more erratic in his determination to keep up with the kangaroo. Standing, Dick takes aim and fires his rifle over the roof of the cab, while Doc fires through the side window. They fail to hit the kangaroo, but eventually they catch up with it and Joe swerves into the animal, knocking it down. On getting out of the vehicle Doc asks for the skinning knife, then crouches beside the animal and cuts off its testicles as the others look on. 'Doc eats them,' Joe explains to the puzzled John, 'reckons they're the best part of the roo'. Dick adds, 'Haven't you ever tried them? Better than oysters,' and with a light slap to John's arm which could be interpreted as either 'matey' or knowing, quips: 'Put lead in your pencil'. The group then retire to the local bar to drink before the night hunt (*Appendix: excerpt CXVIII*).

The representations of Dick and Joe in this sequence confirm the characteristics evident the night before. Both revel in testosterone-fuelled excess, but Dick's enjoyment of gratuitous violence is spiced with lewdness. Dick's upright position in the cab, and the resulting commandeering quality of his directions, shouted in the excitement of the chase, reflects his superior stance in his relationship with the more simplistic Joe. Doc participates in the hunt on his own terms and with an eye for his own gain. His keenness to secure the kangaroo testicles indicates that his primary motivating force for participating in the hunt is the promise of free gastronomic gratification. This attitude accords with his portrayal - and self-acknowledgement - as a man for whom the appetites reign, be they for food, alcohol, or sex. The kangaroo testicles symbolise the trilogy of

Doc's appetites combined: food; as an aphrodisiac, sex; and alcohol; as a trophy to be celebrated and therefore an excuse to drink more.

After the killing of the second kangaroo and the removal of its testicles, John's expression changes to one of sullen apprehension. The editing and the framing leave the direct cause of John's disquiet in question, as his face is not presented in close-up until the end of the sequence. His reaction may be one of disgust at the thought of eating the testicles, or concern that Dick's comment means everyone knows about his 'episode' with Janette. He may also have intuited that Doc's actions hold personal significance for him, foreshadowing his own metaphoric castration or loss of manhood in the homosexual encounter which follows that night. This is also the first kangaroo kill John has been directly involved in, and the first time he has seen the dead animal up close.

The mode of the kill is also worthy of note, for the kangaroo was not shot but knocked down by the ute. For John, a man strictly bound by societal rules and the way 'things ought to be done', the mode of the kill would be a transgression of the power relations constructed between humans and animals when hunting for pleasure. John's cultural understanding of hunting would be a situation in which 'the relations of dominance and submission [are] symbolically reversed' (Dahles, 1993, ¶1), giving the animal a 'fighting chance'. Ignoring this hunting convention constitutes 'a serious violation of the moral code' and 'obvious transgressions are hardly met with indifference, but are causes of cultural controversy and sometimes even anxiety and repulsion' (Douglas, 1966, cited in Dahles, 1993, ¶2). Carl's reaction to the wounded kangaroo in *Razorback* is a graphic

illustration of this point, as is the brothers' decision to leave him in the bush as punishment for transgressing their own hunting code.

In *Wake in Fright*, the daytime kangaroo-hunt sequence provides characterisation through action, and by exhibiting the differing attitudes of the men to animals. Metaphoric allusion is present, but the sequence also advances the narrative through the understanding which the characters gain diegetically from the symbolism inherent in the activity. With the killing of the second kangaroo, the men's deeper animality is revealed to John. Beyond the manners, language and excesses of drinking - the distinguishing behaviour which John has always known to separate him from the rest - he witnesses the fact that they have no sense of 'fair play'. In cultural perception, human behaviour towards animals is as important a marker of humanity, distinguishing the human from the animal, as those of human to human relations. The crossing of the hunter-hunted boundary in John's moral order blurs the distinction between the men and animals on an existential level, rather than merely a social one, as was the case before. As with Doc's removal of the kangaroo's testicles, John may identify the trajectory of his own fate with that of the kangaroo: as victim to a group of men with no intention of 'playing by the rules.'

Throughout the film, the positioning of John's moral compass alters in direct relation to the amount of alcohol he has consumed. At the bar, his humour is restored and he sees and shoots a fox. Excited by his kill, he goes to retrieve it, but as the others laugh, Dick dissuades him: 'It's no good skinnin' it mate. They're all mangy out here.' The fox serves as comment on John's British sensibilities. A traditional game animal in Britain, the fox

is better suited as a hunting subject for John. Like John, this feral animal is not thriving in its new environment. Instead of proving his manhood and skill to the men, shooting the fox confirms John's inferior status, as a source of cultural curiosity and entertainment for the others (*Appendix: excerpt CXIX*).

The extreme realism of the kangaroo-hunting scenes in *Wake in Fright*, noted by various commentators as being hyper-real or surreal, is created to a great extent by the cinematography and the style of the *mise-en-scène*, but the use of real kangaroo-hunt footage also plays a part. A producer's note heading the end credits announces that the hunting sequences depicted:

were taken during an actual kangaroo hunt by professional licensed hunters. For this reason and because the survival of the Australian kangaroo is seriously threatened, these scenes were shown uncut after consultation with leading animal welfare organisations in Australia and the United Kingdom.

On the night hunt, the dramatic tensions evident in the earlier sequence are heightened through the use of lighting, as discussed above, contriving a *mise-en-scène* with the full force of the sublime aesthetic accent inherent in the Australian Gothic style. The themes previously presented in the daylight hunt are similarly inflected and exaggerated. Shooting from the stationary ute at a mob of kangaroos immobilised by the searchlight, the men jostle for position. Enthusiastic once again, John shoots too, but he is soon elbowed out of the way. Several kangaroos go down and the men leave the vehicle to inspect 'a beauty ... a seven-footer for sure'. A close-up of the animal slowly zooms in on

its outstretched paw, its shape and position echoing that of a human hand raised in supplication. The juxtaposed reaction shot suggests John's unease with the human-animal parallel presented, and once again John's identification with the kangaroo is implied. At the periphery of the spotlight's range, the thin, pale limbs of the kangaroos bounding away into the darkness, then folding as they are shot, add to the analogy with echoes of war and concentration-camp imagery (*Appendix: excerpt CXX*).

The men drive over to a 'big fella' which 'just won't go down'. The kangaroo raises itself on its hind legs and confronts the men. Joe gets 'stuck into him' and, waving his hat, goads the kangaroo to fight. Dick and Doc look on and give commentary in the manner of men at a boxing match. Dick says to John: 'See how the roo's trying to draw him in so he can get back on his tail ... see?'. Doc's interest focuses on the sadistic possibilities offered by the technicalities: 'Yeah, then he rips his guts out with his hind legs'. The comment accords with Doc's asocial stance, illustrating that he cares as little for the human as he does for the animal. The scrappy bout ends when Joe gets hold of the kangaroo's tail, grabs the animal from behind, and slits its throat with a knife. The following shot shows John's stunned face. Back in the ute, his disgust manifests in physical form - recalling his reaction with Janette - when he wretches (*Appendix: excerpt CXXI*).

Until the throat-slitting, John watches the fight with rapt concentration. Dick, Joe and Doc all exhibit the traditional hunters' 'high esteem for "fighting" game' (Dahles, 1993, The expressive significance of hunting, ¶3) by measuring 'their power and abilities with strong, cunning and preferably male opponents' (Dahles, 1993, ¶1), and by attributing

human characteristics to the animal. Joe's transgression of the conventions of hunter-hunted power relations through the use of his knife is exacerbated by the human form of the fight itself, and the animal's death iterates the meaning of the human-kangaroo analogy presented before.

More alcohol is consumed, and again John's macho spirit is revived sufficiently that he agrees to 'have a go' at fighting a kangaroo himself. Smiling with ironic intent, Doc advises: 'It's unapproved. I wouldn't do it'. John staggers into the night, but when he comes across a kangaroo, he hesitates. Dick taunts: 'What's the matter, teacher? Are you scared?' Hunting conventions are alluded to in John's excuse - 'It's only a baby ... it's badly wounded' - but by now he is too stupefied to care. He attempts to grab the kangaroo's tail, and while Dick and Joe laugh and make fun of John's efforts - 'He's trying to dance with it!'; 'He's trying to beat the thing to death!' - Doc looks on contemplatively, taking slow swigs of beer from his bottle. A montage of close-ups, contrasting the frenzy of Dick and Joe's laughter with the fear shared by John and the kangaroo, intensifies the grotesquerie of the scenario.

Having failed to subdue the animal through 'fair fight' using only his fists, John eventually stabs the kangaroo. The notion of sex is then added to the mix as John produces a gasping sound reminiscent of an expression of sexual satisfaction or release as he delivers the fatal stab-wound. Still contemplative, Doc gives a quiet and languid 'well done'. As John staggers back to the ute, not so much in drunkenness now as in shocked exhaustion, dragging the kangaroo carcass behind him, the figure of defeat he presents is only intensified by the volley of congratulatory shots being fired into the air by his

hunting-partners. As Turner observes, through his attempts to prove his manhood to the men, John finds that he has sunk to their moral level (1986, p.43) (*Appendix: excerpt CXXII*).

The analogies drawn between John and the kangaroos are indeed foreshadowing. After much more drinking at the bar, John returns to the shack with Doc. John is in a playful mood, and in the ensuing horseplay between the two men, the point at which it becomes no longer mutually consensual is difficult to define. Accordingly, when making reference to the scene most commentators qualify the term 'rape' by placing it within parentheses. The ambiguity of the sequence is congruent with the overriding representational mode of the film. Boundaries are blurred - between cause and effect; perpetrator and victim - through the narrative objectivity of the characterisations. The nature of Doc's contemplation on the hunt as he watches John wrestle with the kangaroo becomes apparent that night when he makes a game of placing John in the role of a kangaroo. First he blinds him with a light, then he grasps him from behind, pretending to slit his throat. In this way, he wrestles the drunken, befuddled and seemingly ambivalent John onto the bed, and in position for the sexual act (*Appendix: excerpt CXXIII*).

In previous conversations with Doc - or rather, through apparently candid monologues delivered by Doc - John has been made aware of Doc's sexual principles. He is a man who breaks the rules and who takes pride in the fact that, by doing so, he has more self-knowledge than most. Doc imparts much of the information about himself through comments about Janette's behaviour. He says he likes Janette because 'she likes sex, she likes experiment and she likes variety'; 'If Janette were a man, she'd be in jail for rape,'

but then: 'what's wrong with a woman taking a man because she feels like it?' To Doc, 'sex is just like eating. It's a thing you do because you have to, not because you want': sex is something that 'most people are afraid of'. Considered within the context of this information, John's willingness to stay another night with Doc could be interpreted as passive consent to whatever might eventuate.

The kangaroo hunts provide added insights into the situation by offering behavioural representations, as opposed to self-proclaimed conceptual characterisations. By maintaining an outward expression of enthusiasm towards hunting to a level approximating that of Dick and Joe, Doc's participation is accepted without question. However, the true focus of Doc's enjoyment is inward, as the examples of his behaviour in the above analysis show. For Dick and Joe, kangaroo hunts are about power, competition, macho display and the dissipation of energy through allowable violence and brutality. For Doc, kangaroo hunts offer arenas full of sadistic spectacle. The kangaroo analogy employed by Doc to frame the horseplay that comprises his seduction of John, or John's submission to Doc, shows him to be not only 'predatory' (Turner, 1986, p. 43), but also premeditative and manipulative. Doc has been 'grooming' John, using his 'hospitality' as a means to finding John's weaknesses and making him break. The hospitality is forced on John, and enforced by Doc, through drink and diversion. John is carried to the shack by Doc and Janette, his partner in sexual 'experimentation', while unconscious. The next morning Doc tells John he cannot leave because he arranged to go on a kangaroo hunt while 'in his cups'. Although the tale is made plausible through Doc's use of detail as he reminds John of his bragging about winning a silver medal for shooting, ultimately the true origins of the plan remain unknown.

When Doc utters his 'well done' after John stabs the kangaroo, it is as if he has finalised his plan. In his shack, Doc has seen that John's weakness lies in his reluctance to abandon his politeness, but during the hunts he has witnessed how far John will go to maintain it. John defines himself by his manners. His actions on the hunts may have brought him down to the level of the others, but he can justify his behaviour as an aberration forced on him by the imperative to be courteous to those offering hospitality. However morally repugnant he may find the situation, John places etiquette first. The swings in his mood result from his struggles to regain his social equilibrium after each moral transgression as much as from the quantity of alcohol he has consumed. It is the same weakness which prevents John from recognising Doc for what he is. John responds to the veneer of social grace that Doc presents as a valid distinction, marking him as superior to Dick and Joe. On the hunts, Doc uses John's misconception to further manipulate him with false solicitousness when he asks, 'Hey, Socrates ... have you got a shot in yet?', and later with his advice, 'I wouldn't do it if I were you'. While the ambiguity surrounding the extent to which John is victim to Doc or victim of his own faults remains, close analysis of the kangaroo-hunting sequences reveals Doc to be the cruellest of the men: not a physical brute, but a psychological one.

As Doc predicts, John is too polite to reject his advances or cause trouble the next day. He leaves quietly with a gift of a rifle, given to him by Dick and Joe. This gift functions ambivalently too. In the first instance, the possession of the rifle allows John to survive in the bush, when he kills and eats a rabbit. Like the fox, the rabbit is a feral European animal, appropriate to John's background. All vestiges of etiquette are abandoned here as the starving John tears into the animal with his teeth, but the cleanness of the kill, and the

necessity of the behaviour, effect a noble representation inviting comparison with the senseless of the kangaroo hunts. A 'lost in the bush' sequence follows, in which the sublime aesthetic is evoked through the use of silhouettes, surreal colouration and electronic music. The style of this representation is remarkably similar to that of Carl's nightmare sequence in *Razorback* (Appendix: excerpt CXXIV). When John emerges from the bush, he exchanges the rifle for a ride to 'the city'. However, 'the city' is not Sydney, as John assumes, but the `Yabba. The truck driver returns the rifle when they arrive, and John then makes his way to Doc's shack with the intention of killing him. Once there, he turns his frustration inward and shoots himself in the head.

Having survived his suicide attempt, as he emerges from the hospital, Doc appears and says to John: 'You'd think a man who'd won a silver medal at target shooting could hit himself in the head at a range of three inches'. John remains silent, but he allows Doc to take his suitcase and escort him to the train-stop. John's politeness remains, but it has taken on a new quality. He neither ignores Doc, nor reacts with more than a wry smile, even to his final baited remark as the train for Tiboona arrives: 'Don't want to miss it.' On the train, a man sitting a few seats along shouts to John: 'Hey mate! Wanna beer?'. John's responding exclamation is ambiguous; mid-way between a 'yeah' and a 'yow' of pain. The man throws him a can of beer and John shouts back 'thanks!' before opening it and taking a drink. This sequence could be understood simply as a convention of the horror genre; as a 'teaser' suggesting that the monster is not yet dead. However, when considered within the context of the theme of social codes, the sequence shows John's shift in values. He no longer applies a 'foreign' Anglo-Australian etiquette to all situations: he has learnt that manners do not always make the man, or even give a true

indication of his nature. Doc may be a man 'who understands both sides' of his small-town existence (Turner, 1986, p. 42), but he only does so for his own malevolent purposes. For John, his time spent with the men from the `Yabba has taught him that real values lie beneath the surface, however they may be presented (*Appendix: excerpt CXXV*).

Long Weekend, released in 1979 and directed by Colin Eggleston, is a rare example of an Australian-produced, genre-based horror film that has satisfied commentators, both as a thriller and as an articulation of Australian inflected themes (Dermoddy & Jacka, 1988; Hood, 1994; Martin, 1995). By placing the universal concerns of the 'revenge-of-the-animals' cycle identified with the period (Mayer, 1999; Aaltola, 2002) in an Australian context, the film finds rich ground. The defining 'alienation-from-nature' narrative of *Long Weekend* is supplemented by the previously discussed contact-related themes of loss, breeding, maternal negativity and invasion. In addition, the film is also structured around the sub-thematic oppositions of the banal and the unprecedented, and entropy and dynamism.

Long Weekend is remarkable not only for its use of indigenous Australian animals in the horror mode, but also for its success in doing so. In accordance with the ecological accent of the narrative, the animals in *Long Weekend* are motivated by revenge, therefore their representation falls mid-way between that of the 'psychopathic' or 'zoohorror' alien monster (*Razorback*), and the indescribable, unknowable animal threat of the Australian Gothic sublime (e.g. *Picnic at Hanging Rock*). Consequently, like *Razorback*, *Long Weekend* offers a form of animal representation unique in Australian cinema. Reasons for the lack of this form of representation have been posited above and, as Ward observes,

given the circumstances, *Long Weekend* does well to make the animals read as threats rather than as signifiers of 'Australia' (2006, ¶7). In part, the effect is achieved by the variety of animals depicted: a mix of animals unique to Australia, together with more widespread species. Koalas, kangaroos, possums, black swans and - oddly for Australian audiences, as the setting is New South Wales - Tasmanian devils all feature; but so do seagulls, ducks, pelicans, eagles, dugongs, crabs, ants and more. Principally, however, it is the film's style and mode which work together to create the intensity necessary for a thriller from 'ordinary' Australian animals: 'the less insistent menaces of ants, birds, a possum, [and] the thick undergrowth' (Hood, 1994, The horror push, ¶3).

Rayner identifies *Long Weekend* as Australian urban Gothic (Rayner, 2000, p.47), but other commentators - again persuaded by the film's classic generic structure - look elsewhere for categorisation. Both Martin, and Dermody and Jacka, associate *Long Weekend* with the horror sub-genre of the *fantastique*, in which nature is imbued with supernatural powers, most usually in response to a human crime committed against it (Martin, 1995, p 40; Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 124) as in Hitchcock's *The Birds* (1963), for example. This categorisation is apt, but only when the distinction is made between the English language cinematic usage of *fantastique*, and the way in which the term is employed in French and Francophone cinema studies. Dermody and Jacka confuse the issue by referring to 'what the French call *la fantastique Australienne*' (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 124), while Martin offers no distinction. In French, *le fantastique* is used to describe a much broader category 'stretching from stories labelled "fantasy" in English, such as Tolkein's novels, to the commercial and artistic manifestations of the present gothic craze' (Palmieri, 2003, Carroll's philosophy, ¶5). The meaning of

fantastique assumed by both Martin and Dermody and Jacka is the much narrower one proposed by Todorov, where ‘the fantastic hesitates between supernatural and natural explanations’ (Palmieri, Carroll’s philosophy, 2003, ¶3).

The ambivalence described by Todorov is an element central to *Long Weekend*, as indeed it is to all the films discussed in this chapter, and the articulation of the Australian Gothic mode. Martin’s comments on the generic role of ambiguity and its presentation in *Long Weekend* are insightful:

While the viewer is clearly, almost emphatically, directed to [the revenge of nature] ‘reading’ of the story, it is never straightforwardly or unambiguously confirmed. The special cinematic potential of such stories comes from the fact that they simultaneously tend towards over determined ‘meaningfulness’ (with every image and sound labouring to hint at allegorical or symbolic points) and its opposite: a sort of queer, flat, surrealistic literalness, meaning nothing ... *Long Weekend*, in its filmic realisation of the necessary ambiguity, remains a fairly unique [*sic*] achievement in Australian cinema. (1995, p. 40)

The representational style of the animals in *Long Weekend* echoes that of *Walkabout* in the use of extreme close-ups and animal point-of-view perspectives. This stylistic link is pointed to, or announced, in the opening credit sequence which recalls the juxtaposition of the brick wall and the desert at the beginning of *Walkabout*. A long take focuses close on a spider slowly climbing up a fissure in a rock, then pans to a long shot of the beach beyond (*Appendix: excerpt CXXVI*). Like *Walkabout*, the narrative also begins with scenes of the main the characters amidst their urban existence: the male protagonist, Peter, on the city streets, the female, Marcia, in the home. Just as the brick wall and the desert

articulate *Walkabout's* culture/nature theme, so the spider and the beach in *Long Weekend's* opening shot signal the impending shift in power relations between the disregarded animals and the humans central to the film. The humans may only have eyes for the beach, but the animals in the environment, however small they may be, are going to make their presence felt.

Peter has arranged a camping trip in a bid to save the rocky marriage, but his wife Marcia, - who 'is not the outdoors type' - would rather spend the long weekend in a luxury hotel. The theme of maternal negativity is introduced early in the film through the couple's interchange about the dog, Cricket. Cricket is Peter's dog, and it is clear that Marcia holds no affection for her. Marcia has failed to arrange for anyone to look after the dog while they're away, planning to leave three cans-worth of dog food in her bowl instead. When Peter objects and decides to take Cricket along on the trip Marcia exclaims: 'Why don't you and Cricket go away and I'll just stay here and bark at the birds!' The theme is made explicit after Peter is attacked by an eagle. He believes the bird was attracted by the smell of the frozen chicken which has mysteriously gone off, but Marcia is adamant that the bird was a female seeking revenge for the egg that Marcia found and kept. Marcia then gets the egg and throws it against a tree to smash it (*Appendix: compilation CXXVII*).

PETER:

Why in the name of God did you do that? What's
the matter with you?

MARCIA:

It's just an egg.

PETER:

It's a living thing. You didn't have to smash it!

MARCIA:

I didn't have to have an abortion, Peter!

The ambiguity which maintains the tension in the film is effected through the pacing of the hints offered and the direct, but still ambiguous, information imparted through the characters' dialogue. So it is only later that we learn that the father of the aborted foetus was not Peter, but Marcia's lover, Mark. The tone of the film's dialogue conveys the brittle state of the couple's relationship with sharp realism throughout, but the detailed exchange about the abortion is particularly raw. The topic comes up as Marcia mocks Peter's idea of camping as pointless fantasy with no valid connection to the reality of their daily lives:

PETER:

Is reality screwing your neighbours and
murdering the unborn?

MARCIA:

You prick! You were so hot for Frieda that you
pushed Mark and me together. Then you bellow
like a wounded tom-cat when the whole grotty
plan backfires in your face!

PETER:

If it wasn't murder, why didn't you tell me
right away?

MARCIA:

It was none of your business.

PETER:

Did you think I'd agree to have it destroyed?

MARCIA:

Nothing was destroyed.

PETER:

You said it cried - those were your words.

MARCIA:

Oh stop it, you pig! I'd rather sleep with
Mark's dog than sleep with you again!

Since their arrival at Moonda beach, Marcia has been haunted by the sound of eerie wails and moans. She is frightened by a dark shape in the ocean. When it returns after Peter has attempted to scare it away with warning gun-shots, he kills it. Later they find the animal

washed-up on the beach: it is a dugong. Peter identifies the animal as ‘the source of the noises you’ve been hearing,’ and continues: ‘She’s probably got a pup in the area. They reckon the young sound just like a human baby when they cry.’ As with the eagle, it is John who shows empathy with the animal. Marcia’s comments on finding it are: ‘it’s ugly’ and ‘it stinks’; while Peter says, ‘Yeah ...she’s not very pretty out of the water, is she?’, then, ‘You poor old lady,’ before he buries the dugong in the sand (*Appendix: compilation CXXVIII*). But Marcia continues to hear the wailing sound, and later she finds that the dugong has moved further up the beach. Although he knows it cannot still be alive, as the hysterical Marcia claims, when he finds Cricket barking at the dugong, Peter shoots it again, with several shots to the head, just to make sure. In the monochromatic light, the blood trickling down the animal’s body suggests weeping, while the non-diegetic wails complete the representation as one of a universal sorrow (*Appendix: compilation CXXIX*).

Right up until the last moments of the film, the suggestion is that it is Marcia who has not only committed a crime against the natural order through having an affair, conceiving to a man who is not her husband and having an abortion, but who is herself unnatural - cold and uncaring towards living creatures: a crime against nature. Such is the ambiguity in the film’s patterns of cause-and-effect that the animals’ behaviour can be read both as reactions to immediate environmental transgressions - Marcia’s handling of the eagle’s egg, for example - *and* punishment for a transgression of a much higher order. Dermody and Jacka interpret the narrative as a biblical allegory, with the creeping dugong in the role of ‘silent accuser’.

The use of the dugong as a symbol is most effective, as the film makes full use of its many denotations and connotations. Also known as the sea-cow, the animal is a harmless herbivore. The film suggests that Marcia has been troubled by imaginary baby-cries before the camping trip – ‘You’re not going to tell me it’s a tom-cat way out here’ – and although Peter pretends he doesn’t hear the sound, he knows what it is, and where it is coming from. Subsequently, he also knows that the dark shape in the ocean is a dugong and not a shark as he lets Marcia believe. He is, therefore, aware that he is shooting a harmless creature. His actions appear to be motivated by the desire to spare his wife from the aural reminder of her abortion, yet as soon as he thinks he has killed the animal and put a stop to the noises, he takes up the role of torturous reminder himself.

The shooting of the dugong represents a hunter-hunted transgression, as discussed above and, as with the kangaroos in *Wake in Fright*, the poignancy of its death is intensified by Peter’s anthropomorphising descriptions once he has killed it. Peter’s comments also recall the dugong’s connection to the myth of the mermaid, and the traditional belief that sailors mistook the animal for half-human female sea-creatures because of the manner in which they cradle their young in their flippers. And, even in death, empathy with the animal is invited through its large, plaintive, mammalian eyes.

The dugong’s role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, as a traditional hunt-animal and ritual food, introduces another thematic interpretation of the film. For Dermody and Jacka: ‘*Long Weekend* accords with the self-loathing of liberal Australians for their material and spiritual sins against the continent’ (Dermody & Jacka, 1988, p. 126). Apart from the killing of the dugong, which can be read as a signifier of post-

colonial angst, and smashing of the eagle egg, the other 'sins' depicted in the film are those of omission or a carelessness exemplifying the city couple's alienation from nature. Despite the setting, *Long Weekend* is a contact narrative in which the bush and the animals function as the 'other' encountered by the urban protagonists, and therefore an articulation of the urban Gothic mode, as Rayner maintains. The contact-related theme of loss is implied in the representations of maternal negativity and breeding as discussed above: Marcia's loss of her unborn child; the eagle's loss of its egg; the dugong pup's loss of its mother and the couple's loss of their marriage - and ultimately their lives.

The play between the banal and the unprecedented in the film is, of course, a structuring device effecting the ebb and flow of tension necessary to the thriller. In *Long Weekend*, the 'everyday' premise driving the narrative elicits portrayals of the banal through domestic routine: the defrosting of a chicken; doing the washing-up; eating breakfast. Unprecedented events interrupt the mundane minutia: the chicken rots inexplicably; an unattended spear-gun fires off as Marcia passes; an eagle attacks; a possum bites. Episodes of chaos resulting from the aberrant animal behaviour are interspersed with those of entropy. The entropy of Marcia and Peter's marriage is conveyed through their arguments when they are together, and through their boredom when they are apart. Peter dissipates his energy by getting drunk and pretending to be a cowboy, by getting stoned and reading *Playboy*; while Marcia makes impulsive attempts to leave or lies around reading 'dirty novels'. Their sexual energies are polarised into auto-erotic expression (*Appendix: compilation CXXX*).

The *fantastique* quality of menace imparted to the ‘ordinary’, non-venomous, Australian animals through the use of extreme close-ups and animal point-of-view perspectives is supplemented by the accompanying soundscape. Instrumental and electronic effects accentuate and distort the noises of the environment - the calls and cries of the animals - into supernatural confusion and uncertainty; or counterpoint the suspenseful tone of the music with accenting beats of shock. Both in daylight at night, much of the terror of the *mise-en-scène* depends upon this aural interpretation of the Gothic sublime and the ‘special terrors’ the sounds carry for ‘women and vulnerable men’ (Morris, 1998, p. 249) (*Appendix: compilation CXXXI*)

The narrative never settles on a single explanation for the transgression which prompts the animals’ revenge. The sequences depicting the native animals in the serenity of their undisturbed being, which are intercut with the human action, point to Marcia and Peter’s intrusion as being the problem, while simultaneously announcing the animals’ innocence; both universally and in the couple’s harassment (*Appendix: compilation CXXXII*). Towards the end of the film, Peter’s discovery of an abandoned campsite, seemingly set-up by children, with a table laid for a tea-party and a soft-toy panda; and a dead body, drowned in a combi-van under the ocean, shifts the blame away from the specifics of Marcia and Peter’s relationship to the crimes against the environment perpetrated by humanity in general. This broader theme of eco-doom is indicated through the visual emphasis placed on the couple’s carelessness: a cigarette-butt thrown from the car by Peter starts a fire in the bush; insecticide is sprayed around the camp by Marcia.

As with Carl in *Razorback* and John in *Wake in Fright*, a symbolic link is drawn in *Long Weekend* between Peter and a kangaroo. On the drive to the beach, tired and inattentive, Peter hits and kills a kangaroo. Running out of the bush to get help after Marcia's death, Peter is run over by a truck, as the driver is distracted by a cockatoo flying into the cab and attacking him. The actions of the driver echo those of Peter towards the dead kangaroo as he casually walks over to Peter's body, sees that he is dead, and leaves him on the road (*Appendix: compilation CXXXIII*).

In *Bad Boy Bubby* (1994), directed by Rolf de Heer, the eco-doom theme is presented directly in an urban *mise-en-scène*. Seen through the eyes of the main protagonist, the city is a manifestation of the unknown and unknowable sublime, with an atmosphere polluted by: 'poisons and cancers from asbestos, lead car exhausts PCBs ... dioxins ... mercury [and] radioactivity'. But the main poisons in the film are psychological: the mental suffocation which results from varying degrees of parental abuse. As Rayner observes, *Bad Boy Bubby* displays a 're-orientation of Gothic elements (such as the iniquity of authority, the fallibility of the hero, and the inconstancy of the given or constructed human world)' identified in the Australian films of the 1990s, with 'the black humour characteristic of Gothic films of the 1970s' (2000, p. 142), such as that of *The Cars That Ate Paris*, for example. In *Bad Boy Bubby*, interactions with animals are used to depict the state of the main protagonist's psychopathology.

For 35 years, Bubby has been imprisoned in the home and in an incestuous sexual relationship with his mother, who has told him that the air outside the tiny apartment is poisonous. Tying him up to a chair when she leaves, his mother confirms his belief that

he will die if he goes outside by donning a gas-mask. The child-like Bubby's social dysfunction from lack of normal interaction reveals itself through his compulsion towards mimicry of animals as well as humans. The family cat functions as a metaphoric representation of Bubby's situation, a subject for his victim/perpetrator transference, and as a foreshadowing device.

The opening sequence of the film shows Bubby crouching over the caged cat, oblivious to its distress as he imitates its cries. He catches cockroaches and pulls off their legs before feeding them to the cat. The significance of the action is indicated through the use of extreme close-up. Analogous to Bubby himself, the legless cockroach twitches ineffectually on its back, immobilised by intentional cruelty. The image and its attendant meaning is repeated later in the film when Bubby is locked in a jail cell. The connection between Bubby and the cat is directly drawn when, dressed in his mother's clothes, he taunts the cat which, like Bubby, has been tied to the chair with string. Reminiscent of the use of transference between Norman Bates and his dead mother in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960), the representation crystallises the dynamics at work in Bubby and Mom's relationship, both visually and through the dialogue: 'Be still'; 'By Christ, I'll beat you brainless'; 'You can't go outside because there's no gas-mask' (*Appendix: compilation CXXXIV*).

As in *Razorback* and *Wake in Fright*, the representation of human-animal relationships in *Bad Boy Bubby* also draws on the intuitive understandings of the audience for the full power of their meaning. Psychological research continues to explore the link between animal abuse in childhood and psychopathic behaviour in adulthood, but the existence of

findings positing the correlation to be a positive one are known in wider society (Arluke & Lockwood, 1997). In addition, Bubby's actions can be read as expressions of impotent rage against his mother, as they echo 'much earlier forms of (mainly European) symbolism' in which the 'vilification of the cat' is related to the animal's associations with 'femininity and evil' (Smith, 1999, p. 288).

When his mother tells him that the cat is able to survive outside because it does not breathe, Bubby wraps the animal in clingfilm to test the theory, killing it in the same manner in which he will later kill Mom and Pop. The dead cat functions as an indicator of Bubby's unsocialised naivety and his lack of understanding of the concept of death; for example, when he removes it from its cage and tries to feed it after the murder of his parents. He takes the mummified form of the cat with him in a suitcase on his 'picaresque' (Conomos, 1995, p. 377) adventures, which begin when he finally leaves his home and realises that he can breathe the air and survive (*Appendix: compilation CXXXV*). Bubby only relinquishes the decomposing cat once he has found a new family in the punk band he takes up with. Although their discovery of the dead cat – through its smell – alerts them to the fact that Bubby is likely to be the 'clingwrap killer' in the newspaper headlines, the band decide he is harmless and worth keeping on after he presents them with \$50,000 he has stolen from a service-station by distracting the attendant with the putrid animal.

Bubby's next encounter with a cat comes when he sleeping rough after being separated from the band. He has re-visited the crime-scene at his former home and broken-down in apparent realisation of the implications of his actions, then left again dressed as the vicar

Pop. After hissing at the kitten, then enticing it closer with 'good cat' before holding it, his initial words to the cat echo his relationship with the first. As it plays with a wad of plastic, Bubby automatically exclaims: 'Don't move, you little cunt! I'll beat your brains out, by Christ!' Then he appears to have a change of heart, calling the kitten 'good girl', 'good cat' and saying: 'don't go ... Bubby get pizza for cat'. This change in attitude towards the animal signifies the development in Bubby's psychological healing process, as he finds some good experiences amongst the bad in the city. Bubby's mission to get the kitten some food is interrupted when he is reunited with the punk band. After the success of the gig, in which he has fronted the band with a 'performance' of dialogue and animal noises from his disturbed past, he insists on returning to the cat with the pizza.

Bubby has by now fully taken on the persona of Pop, with the addition of a sense of parental duty absent in the original. On returning to the kitten he finds three youths torturing it. They run away after Bubby shouts at them to leave it alone, but the cat is dead. Once again, Bubby refuses to acknowledge the death; he tries to interest the cat in the pizza and says, 'Don't be still, cat'. The next day, as he sits on a park bench stroking the dead kitten on his knee, he is approached by a group of cerebral palsy sufferers and their carers. A girl communicates with him from her wheelchair and he understands her meaning: 'The cat be dead'. Bubby's ability to accept this fact again signals a development in his psyche, and the encounter is also the beginning of his happy relationship with Angel, the girl's carer (*Appendix: compilation CXXXVI*).

The straight-forward pragmatism making Angel so suitable for Bubby is illustrated in her attitude towards his dead cat. Settling him into his new room, she says simply: 'Here's

your bed and here's your suitcase. I've put the cat in the freezer and we can bury that tomorrow, ok?' After burying the cat with a brief 'ashes to ashes' ritual, Angel tries to comfort Bubby by telling him, 'She's happy with God now.' Bubby's enigmatic reply - 'And it is the duty of all human beings to think God out of existence' - is again met with nonchalance by Angel: 'Full of surprises aren't we?' The extent of Angel's pragmatism is revealed towards the end of the film when Bubby clingwraps and murders her bullying, abusive parents. Looking out over the industrial cityscape, silhouetted against a sunset florid with pollution, she rationalises: 'They were just waiting to die anyway, Bubby. They were riddled with poisons and cancers.' The final section of the film suggests 'the fragile or illusory nature of any individual's bliss in the contemporary world' (Rayner, 2000, p. 141). Having survived the psychologically polluting atmosphere of their respective family lives, and experienced the 'fresh-air' of a new interior existence, the couple must now find a way to survive together in the on-going, physical pollution of the exterior (*Appendix: excerpt CXXXVII*).

Wake in Fright, *Long Weekend* and *Bad Boy Bubby* all provide examples of ways in which human-animal interactions function as conceits for both general characterisations, and as signifiers in expressions of psychological deviancy or social transgression. In *Wake in Fright*, focus on the kangaroo-hunting sequences and the light they throw on social codes, elicits a more positive interpretation than that proposed by Turner, who states that the film 'establishes that its protagonist's personal horizon is utterly dependent upon recognising the limitations of his context' (1986, p. 43). The film can be read alternatively as a rite-of-passage for the protagonist - an interior journey as much as an exterior adventure - through which he realises that his problems stemmed from his

adherence to an inappropriate and ineffective social value system that has no place in the new country. By becoming aware, and appreciative of, the values inherent in Australian social codes, his personal horizons are broadened by the promise of the more positive choices he will be able to make within his context. Viewed in this light, the dark and disturbing narrative of *Wake in Fright* can be seen to include the positive message of the possibility of successful assimilation amongst its other themes.

As an indicator of social or psychological deviancy or imbalance, characterisation through the representation of human-animal interaction is a mode which straddles both the cultural codes specific to Australia, and the wider codes of human-animal interaction as identified with the Western world and, broadly speaking, with the modern world as a whole. In *Wake in Fright*, as in *Razorback*, the Australian inflections of these universal human-animal codes are highlighted through the culturally specific conventions of hunting. In *Long Weekend*, the Australian cultural inflection resides in the dugong, while in *Bad Boy Bubby*, the symbolism of the cat serves as a universal cinematic metaphor, albeit with a European subtext. Through the prism of the animal-centred reading, the articulations of Australian horror considered in this and the previous chapter can be seen to rest upon, and speak of, universal human fears.

Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to reconsider representations of identity in selected Australian feature films, released between 1971 and 2001, through animal-centred readings. This approach was motivated by the observation that, despite the salient role of the landscape in the development of white Australian identity, and the prominence of the landscape discourse in dominant film commentary, little attention has been afforded to the function of the animal image in the context of the meanings educed. The insights of Berger (1980) and Baker (1993), amongst others, point to the significance of the animal image as a cultural representational code, and to its particular relevance in questions of identity. In line with Giddens (1991) and Hall (1996), Berger and Baker recognise the human-animal relationship as an elemental dichotomy of identity, and consequently, the analysis of the representation of these relationships as key to the deconstruction of the naturalisation of identity.

Principally, the analyses in this study confirm my original proposition that animal-centred readings of the selected films would reveal a rich seam of fresh interpretative possibilities relevant to the discourse of Australian national cinema and identity. Within the specifics of the discussion, I have also argued that many of the cultural significations and thematic nuances offered by the texts have been overlooked or misinterpreted by dominant commentary.

Walkabout introduces a new mode and style of animal representation evident in many subsequent Australian films, most notably in this study: *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, *Mad Dog Morgan* and *Long Weekend*. In the analysis of animal symbolism, human-animal representation and the objective or ‘ecological’ perspective in post-Revival Australian cinema, *Walkabout* functions as the seminal text.

Films set around the time of Federation featuring marginalised protagonists and the landscape are found to be nationing allegories, presenting themes of equal import and greater contemporary relevance than those of male representation, which have traditionally been given prominence in the dialectic of Australian cinematic identity. Characterisations depicting recognition and interest in indigenous fauna - as in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and *We of the Never Never* - together with concern for their captivity or well-being - as in *My Brilliant Career* and *The Goddess of 1967* - signal the films as expressions of the capacity for belonging. Contesting previous interpretations of these representations as passive, the expression of their relationship with the landscape is shown to be one of active intellectual engagement. The films describe an ‘entering into’ the landscape: an existential, progressive conceit of naturalisation and assimilation. These inflections are also found in the more recent narratives of the marginalised, which exhibit a shift in focus from the concerns of emerging nationhood to those of Australia’s emerging cosmopolitanism.

In the examination of representations of the male and the landscape, the privileging of the physical activity of human-animal interaction resituate the texts beyond the customary matrices of patriarchal affirmation and the promotion of a pastoral ethos. The motif of

human-animal 'mateship' in *The Man From Snowy River* is brought into relief, recasting the film as an acknowledgement of the need to work in partnership with not only the land, as Turner (1986) has noted, but also with the animals living within it. In *Crocodile Dundee*, identification of the theme of inter-species egalitarianism reveals the film to be a more complex exposition of Australian identity than previously recognised, marking a distinct development in the progression of national representations. In *Mad Dog Morgan* and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, resolution to conflict is presented through symbolic metamorphosis into animality, a mode which foregrounds the narratives as those of marginalisation. Through an animal-centred analysis, *Mad Dog Morgan* is found to accord with the current cinematic *zeitgeist*, in style as well as in content: qualities which suggest that inclusion of the film in contemporary discussions of Australian identity would be of value.

Analysis of the horror genre foregrounds the nexus between Australian identity, assimilation and metamorphosis into animality. The feral/indigenous dichotomy is identified as a key trope in Australian representation; most clearly exemplified in the narratives of *Howling III: The Marsupials* and *Razorback*. The role of the representations of human-animal relationships as indicators of deviance in the structuring of characterisation is found to be an important one, as illustrated in the discussion of *Razorback*, *Wake in Fright*, *Long Weekend* and *Bad Boy Bubby*. Consideration of the horror genre also points to the way in which the privileging of animal representations works to foreground the universality of the films' concerns, while simultaneously grounding them in a specific culture and location.

In addition to highlighting some of the previously latent denotations, connotations and themes carried in the selected films, the engagement with Australian film criticism necessitated by this study has led to further observations. The dynamics of Australian film commentary appear to be recursive or self-reflexive. While the role of the sublime aesthetic in Australian art and culture is integral to the dialectic, commentary repeats the omissions inherent in the viewpoint of the sublime by failing to recognise the codes and conventions signified in the detail of filmic representations. In this sense, the full power of Australian landscape films remains ‘unseeable’ and ‘unsayable’.

As a result, the ‘Australian voice’ continues to be filtered through an anachronistic ideology holding scant resonance in contemporary culture, a problem which has been identified by O’Regan:

Australians need to be resituated within their own culture and history with new and more relevant symbols than that of the Australian legend, mateship [and] the Aussie battler. (O’Regan, 2000, *The Demise of the Quality Film*, ¶4).

New interpretations, such as those presented in this study, promise to reinvigorate old texts by uncovering a fresh relevancy in them for modern audiences. Focus on the animal image provides a powerful tool with which to achieve this for three reasons. The animal image has direct relevance to the articulation of Australian identity; the animal image holds and conveys a quality of timelessness, and the animal image is central to present interest in environmental concerns. Within the limits of this study alone, many of the films have been re-interpreted as allegories of optimism and environmentalism, while generic horror films, previously dismissed as irrelevant in the discourse of national

cinema, have been shown to explore and re-present the codes and conventions traditional to portrayals of 'Australianess' in a fresh and compelling way.

As Molloy observes, in *Before the Interval*: 'the precise nature of the relationship between society and the [works of art] that image it has proved difficult to specify' (1990a, xvi). However, the role of textual analysis and commentary, as a guide to not only that which can be spoken about, but also to the recognition and appreciation of diversity in Australian film, cannot be denied (see O'Regan, 1987). The animal image is a symbol with the potential to connect Australian cinema with global audiences, through films which are culturally specific yet thematically universal. In this discussion, *The Man From Snowy River* and *Crocodile Dundee* provide two such examples.

The international box-office success of *Babe*, and most recently *Happy Feet*, also stand as testimony to the universal appeal of the animal image, although admittedly they are not films directly concerned with Australian identity. As animated features, *Babe* and *Happy Feet* point to one of the many areas in the field of Australian animal representation open for further study. In addition to the countless feature films from all periods of Australian film production which have necessarily been omitted from this study, examination of the representation of the animal image in Australian documentary films could also be of interest. Within these various genres there is also the possibility of various thematic approaches, for example: animals and mateship; animals and rites of passage; animals and the bush/city dichotomy; animals and xenophobia; animals and gender; animals and indigenous representation; animals and comedy. A study of the animal symbol in terms of international significations could result in findings of interest

to film-makers wishing to connect with a global audience. In addition, there is much room for study more rigorously adherent to a consistent methodology or semiotic theory, in contrast to the mixed-method approach adopted in this thesis.

The burgeoning interest in the environment is also relevant to the discussion of animal representation in film on a purely pragmatic level. In this context, the disappearance of reality foreseen by Baudrillard in 1981 is already evinced through the example of the Thylacine. As seen in *Howling III: The Marsupials*, the animal continues to live on in the public imagination solely through the few remaining segments of footage from the 1930s. Many of the species currently most vulnerable to extinction are uniquely Australian. The prospect of future generations having no choice but to experience some species through the mediations of technology is a very real one, whether the animals succumb to extinction or not.

The animal image has been linked with cinema since its beginnings. In 1878, Eadweard Muybridge used a series of photographs of a running horse to explore the illusion of movement, while one of the first films produced in Australia - and arguably, the first film produced for commercial purposes - was *The Melbourne Cup*, shot by Marius Sestier in 1896. The resituation of animal representations firmly within the discourse of Australian cinema and identity has the potential to initiate a re-evaluation and re-appreciation of Australian film. And such a shift in the ideology of the discussion has the potential to influence Australian film practice as a whole.

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Filmography

A Breed Apart (1984, Dir. Philippe Mora)
According to Occam's Razor (1999, Dir. Philippe Mora)
Alien (1979, Dir. Ridley Scott)
Alvin Purple (1973, Dir. Tim Burstall)
Babe (1995, Dir. Chris Noonan)
Bad Boy Bubby (1993, Dir. Rolf de Heer)
Bliss (1985, Dir. Ray Lawrence)
Bitter Springs (1950, Dir. Ralph Smart)
Brother, Can You Spare A Dime? (1975, Dir. Philippe Mora)
Citizen Kane (1941, Dir. Orson Welles)
Communion (1989, Dir. Philippe Mora)
Crocodile Dundee (1986, Dir. Peter Faiman)
Dead Calm (1989, Dir. Phillip Noyce)
Death of a Soldier (1986, Dir. Philippe Mora)
Going Down (1983, Dir. Haydn Keenan)
Goodbye Paradise (1983, Dir. Carl Schultz)
Happy Feet (2006, Dir. George Miller)
Heatwave (1982, Dir. Phillip Noyce)
Homesdale (1971, Dir. Peter Weir)
Howling: New Moon Rising (1995, Dir. Clive Turner)
Howling II: Stirba- Werewolf Bitch (1985, Dir. Philippe Mora)

Howling III: The Marsupials (1987, Dir. Philippe Mora)

Japanese Story (2003, Dir. Sue Brooks)

Jedda (1955, Dir. Charles Chauvel)

Long Weekend (1979, Dir. Colin Eggleston)

Love Serenade (1995, Dir. Shirley Barrett)

Mad Dog Morgan (1976, Dir. Philippe Mora)

Mad Max (1979, Dir. George Miller)

Mad Max 2 (1981, Dir. George Miller)

Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome (1985, Dirs. George Miller & George Ogilvie)

Man of Flowers (1983, Dir. Paul Cox)

Mother's Little Murderer (2004, Dir. Philippe Mora)

My Brilliant Career (1979, Dir. Gillian Armstrong)

Newsfront (1978, Dir. Phillip Noyce)

The Adventures of Barry MacKenzie (1972, Dir. Bruce Beresford)

The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert (1994, Dir. Stephan Elliot)

The Beast Within (1982, Dir. Philippe Mora)

The Birds (1963, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock)

The Cars That Ate Paris (1974, Dir. Peter Weir)

The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith (1978, Dir. Fred Schepisi)

The Fly (1986, Dir. David Cronenberg)

The Goddess of 1967 (2001, Dir. Clara Law)

The Howling (1980, Dir. Joe Dante)

The Last Wave (1977, Dir. Peter Weir)

The Man From Snowy River (1982, Dir. George Miller)

The Return of Captain Invincible (1983, Dir. Philippe Mora)

The Squatter's Daughter (1933, Dir. Ken. G. Hall)

Palm Beach (1979, Dir. Albie Thoms)

Picnic at Hanging Rock (1975, Dir. Peter Weir)

Psycho (1960, Dir. Alfred Hitchcock)

Pterodactyl Women From Beverly Hills (1994, Dir. Philippe Mora)

Puberty Blues (1981, Dir. Bruce Beresford)

Rangle River (1936, Dir. Clarence Badger)

Razorback (1984, Dir. Russel Mulcahy)

Shame (1988, Dir. Steve Jodrell)

Snide and Prejudice (1997, Dir. Philippe Mora)

Sons of Matthew (1949, Dir. Charles Chauvel)

Star Struck (1982, Dir. Gillian Armstrong)

Stork (1971, Dir. Tim Burstall)

Swastika (1973, Dir. Philippe Mora)

Wake in Fright (1971, Dir. Ted Kotcheff)

Walkabout (1971, Dir. Nicholas Roeg)

Walk the Talk (2000, Dir. Shirley Barrett)

We of the Never Never (1982, Dir. Igor Auzins)

Welcome to Woop Woop (1998, Dir. Stephan Elliot)